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The Character of Godly Teens Daniel 1:1-21

Introduction

We live in an increasingly strange society. Those things which were once the hallmarks of American culture have long since disappeared. Among them is the expectation that those who used to be called “*young people*” or “*young adults*” - those in their teen years - can and should handle increasingly serious responsibility. Instead, our society has extended childhood through high school and into the college years. The model given to our teens in these institutions is that they should enjoy parties, games and entertainment before taking on the responsibilities that come with joining the work force. This kind of thinking only feeds the innate selfishness that exists in all humans. Colleges are increasingly becoming institutions of higher parties instead of learning, and the Federal government take over of the student loan industry has given the American taxpayer the privilege of subsidizing these party years - as well as dramatically increasing the price of higher education.

It is normal for young adults to want to increase in their independence corresponding to increase in responsibility they have for their own lives. My guess is that is still fairly normal, but there is a large portion of young adults, including college graduates, that want the freedom of independence without the corresponding responsibilities. This is showing up in two major areas. First, adults in their late twenties and even into their thirties who continue to live on their parents income. While there are legitimate reasons for a young adult to still live at home including preparing to establish themselves, there are many who are doing this because they don’t want to grow up. I lived with my parents until I got married at 29 because it was a way to reduce my expenses while in Seminary and we all enjoyed being together. I provided the same opportunity for my sons. After turning 18, I would provide room and board while they were in college or career training, but they were expected to carry their weight in family chores, and if they were only working, they were to be expected to pay for board and save toward their initial expenses when they went out on their own. Jonathan saved up enough this way to have the down payment for his home. But what do you say about adults who continue to be supported by their parents and their chief occupation seems to be video games or other non-productive activity. They want freedom to do what they want without the adult responsibility of providing for themselves.

This delay in growing up also shows up in the average age of first marriages. Even among those who are working, the average age of first marriages as of 2021 in the U.S.A. was 28.6 for women and 30.6 for men, and women increasingly complain they can’t find a responsible man to marry. The men want the physical benefits of marriage but also want to continue to play games and party instead of being a responsible leader and provider for his family.

Now in saying all of this, I want to point out there are still many exceptions to these trends for there still are plenty of young adults who are showing themselves to be responsible and are setting aside their selfishness in order to serve others. We see that in many of our teens at this church.

In our study of Daniel 1 this morning we will see the characteristics that set Daniel and his three friends apart from the other young adults of his generation, and God greatly blessed them because of it. They are a model of what godly teens should be like which is an inspiration for those who are currently young adults and for those working with them to instill these virtues. Turn to Daniel 1.

Jerusalem is Captured - Daniel 1:1-2

In our introduction to Daniel last week we learned about the writer and historical setting of this book,

so if you missed that, be sure to get a copy of the notes or get the link to the audio or video recording of the sermon which can be found on our website. (GraceBibleNY.org).

Chapter 1 begins with the fall of Jerusalem. *“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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.”*

Jehoiakim’s father, Josiah, was the last good king of Judah and the last independent king. There will not be another good or independent Jewish king in Jerusalem until Jesus returns to set up the Millennial kingdom. Jehoiakim was placed on the throne by Pharaoh Neco after Josiah had been defeated and killed in battle. Pharaoh in turn was defeated by the Babylonian prince Nebuchadnezzar who then came to Jerusalem and besieged it. Jehoiakim was an evil king as would be all those that followed him. The fall of Jerusalem had been prophesied many times by various prophets due to the evil that had arisen in Judah. The reign of Josiah had only been a brief reprieve from the evils of Manasseh and Amon. Jeremiah was the current prophet and he had been warning the nation for some time about God’s judgment upon them and the coming captivity by Babylon which would last for seventy years (Jeremiah 25).

The day finally arrived when the prophecies came true and Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. He took some of the things that were in the Temple as booty to be placed in the temple of his own god in Shinar. He also took some of the people captive as described in the next two verses.

The Captured Youths - Daniel 1:3-4

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every [branch of] wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king’s court; and [he ordered him] to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

Nebuchadnezzar was very particular about whom he would bring to Babylon. He was not looking for slave labor but rather those who could be trained to extend his rule into the kingdoms he had conquered. In other words, he was not looking for a short term gain for his kingdom, but had a plan for consolidating the power of Babylon over the kingdoms he had conquered for generations to come. By finding and training the right people to be his government officials they would be “Babylonianized” to be faithful to him. These leaders would then later train their own people in Babylonian ways and thus extend Babylonian influence in the generations to come whether the people were left in the land or deported.

Since his plan was to train Jews to help him govern the Jewish people, strengthen his own kingdom and reduce the possibility of a future revolt, he needed Jews who met certain characteristics. The first qualification was that they were of the royal family or nobility. In a nation that had been ruled by kings, the royal family and their relatives would automatically gain loyalty from among the people simply because of their hereditary position. By taking those from among the ruling families, Nebuchadnezzar would also have hostages that would help prevent rebellion by those left in Jerusalem while the future leaders were being trained.

The second qualification was being a “youth.” The word here, יָלֵד / yeled, is used most often of young children but can also be used for adolescents as is the case here. It would not be possible for a young child to meet all the qualifications listed here. These would be those we often refer to as “teen-agers” and probably on the younger side of that. The king wanted youths because they would be easier to train. It is not so much “*you cannot teach an old dog new tricks*” but that an “*old dog*” may reject what you are trying to teach him favor of his old ways. Youths would have already demonstrated the needed

intelligence, but their lack of experience would have left them more vulnerable to influences that could change their core belief system.

A quick word of caution here for nothing has changed. We have a lot of very intelligent youth that are turned from the belief system they were taught as children by contrary teachers in Jr & Sr High School and professors in college. Parents, you need to be very careful about the education of the youth in your home. You must be more serious about interacting with them in those years than when they were young, and yet that is exactly when too many parents are less involved. Be prepared to discuss every issue under the sun and have your own belief system challenged as they grapple with a sinful and increasingly anti-Christian society that is contrary to what you believe is really true. And do not assume that a “Christian” school or college will actually teach a Biblical world-view. Far too many of them teach a secular world view disguised by theological lip service and some perfunctory prayer during the day.

The third qualification was physical. It is generally true that a physically fit leader is a better leader. First, leadership can be physically taxing so the stamina that comes from being in good physical shape is needed to carry out the many responsibilities. Second, people naturally are more prone to follow someone that is good looking as compared to someone with obvious physical deficiencies. King Saul was acclaimed for being tall and handsome and so was able to win the favor of the people rather easily. This is still true today even in American politics which has been detrimentally changed by photography and television. It is almost to the point that people who are not “*good looking*” shouldn’t bother to run for office regardless of their qualifications to do the actual job.

The fourth qualification was mental ability. A good looking man from the royal family would not do King Nebuchadnezzar any good if he lacked the intelligence to do the job. The king wanted those who were “*skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning and competent to stand in the king’s palace*” (ESV). They needed to demonstrate they were intelligent and had a good breadth of education.

The last qualification of being “*competent to stand [or serve] in the king’s palace*” refers to ability to follow proper etiquette. Since these captives were from the royal family and the nobility they should have already understood at least the basics of protocol in serving a king. This was even more important in ancient time since failure to do so could cost you your life (as pointed out in Esther 4).

Verse 4 also lists out the particular subjects they would study which included the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Learning the Chaldean language is an obvious necessity. The Chaldean literature includes more than what we might think of in a literature class. It is training in Chaldean culture and world view. They would be taught to understand the world through Chaldean eyes. The goal was to make these Jewish youths Babylonian in their thinking and loyalty for only then would they be true servants of the Babylonian king.

The King’s Provision - Daniel 1:5

In order to make sure these youths would have the maximum benefit of this training, the king would provide for them - verse 5.

“And the king appointed for them a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank, and [appointed] that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to stand before the king.”

Certainly they would need to be provided for during their years of training and good food would benefit that. However, please note that this was not just a provision of food to physically sustain them and enable them to be trained properly. This isn’t just food, it is “*from the king’s choice food.*” This food was part of their training and plan to make them loyal to the king that had taken them captive. This is the good stuff that would turn the heart of a teen. Remember, they had endured a siege and had lost the war. They had gotten used to eating very poor food and now in Babylon it was excellent food and wine.

It would be hard for someone without a great sense of history and understanding of the Lord not to be turned by such treatment. The king was endearing himself to them and creating in them an obligation of loyalty.

We also find out in this verse that the length of the time of their training would be three years. This would be three years of intensive indoctrination in all things Babylonian after which they would enter the king's personal service wherever he would desire.

Four Faithful Teens - Daniel 1:6-7

Verses 6-7 introduces us to four young men that will demonstrate themselves to be different from the rest of the young captives. *6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 Then the commander of the officials set names for them; and for Daniel he set [the name] Belteshazzar, for Hananiah Shadrach, for Mishael Meshach, and for Azariah Abed-nego.*

Daniel means "God is my judge." He was given the Babylonian name of Belteshazzar which means "Bel protect his life." However, he is consistently referred to as Daniel with even Nebuchadnezzar using both names to identify him. Hananiah, which means "Yahweh has been gracious," had his name changed to Shadrach, which means "command of Aku" which was the Babylonian moon god. Mishael, which means "who is like God?" had his name changed to Meshach which means "who is like Aku?" Azariah, which means "Yahweh has helped," had his name changed to Abednego which means "Servant of Nebo." Nebo was the son of the Babylonian god, Bel.

Even today people who move to a new land that is dominated by a different language and culture have their names changed to something more understandable in that culture. That is actually true of some of you here today. Even more so this happened to people that were captured and deported. It identifies the person in the new culture. It signified ownership by the victorious culture, and it often had religious overtones in glorifying the gods of the conquering culture. In this case, each of these four young men had names that made reference to the God of Israel and they received new names that made reference to a god of Babylon.

Daniel's Resolve & Request - Daniel 1:8-13

In many ways the new situation had the potential of being very beneficial to these young captives. They were certainly getting better food than they had in a long time. They had passed all immediate danger of being killed in battle. They were going to gain further education in one of the most advanced cultures of the world at that time. Jeremiah had even said that this captivity would be for their welfare and to give a future and hope (Jeremiah 29:11). However, verse 8 informs us that Daniel discovered a problem that would need to be resolved quickly.

"But Daniel set in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself."

The text does not tell us the specific reason that Daniel concluded that the king's food and wine would defile him. Perhaps Daniel was considering Proverbs 23:1-3, "*Proverbs 23:1-3 (LSB)* ¹ "When you sit down to dine with a ruler, Understand well what is before you, ² So you should put a knife to your throat If you are a man of appetite. ³ Do not desire his delicacies, For it is bread of falsehood." However, this verse specifically states Daniel did not want to be defiled by it so there must have been more than him just seeing the deception in it.

When it came to eating meat, there were specific regulations in the Mosaic law about how the animal was to be killed as well as what could and could not be eaten otherwise the meat would defile the one who ate it. These dietary laws are usually referred to now as being "kosher." Non-kosher meat that would defile would include both forbidden animals and permitted animals killed in the wrong manner or still included the blood or the forbidden parts of the fat.

Except for those that had taken Nazirite vows (Numbers 6) there were no restrictions on wine itself. However, it is likely that the wine being given to them (as well as the meat) may have first been dedicated to the Babylonian gods. To drink of it would then be to participate in the recognition of those idols and deities.

Daniel had “*set in his heart*” that he would not to defile himself. He knew what was right before God and set his will that he would not violate God’s dietary commands or do anything that might be part of the worship of gods he knew were false. This however created a dilemma. He was a captive and could only eat what was given to him. Daniel demonstrated his character by first making an appeal to the official that was over him instead of just being defiant. He would put the matter in God’s hands, for the very nature of his appeal required God’s intervention.

Daniel 1:9–13 (LSB) ⁹ Now God granted Daniel lovingkindness and compassion before the commander of the officials, ¹⁰ and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.” ¹¹ But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² “Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ “Then let our appearance be observed before you and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king’s choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see.”

God had already granted Daniel kindness and mercy with the commander that was over him and his friends so that he listened to Daniel’s appeal, but he was immediately afraid. The official was willing to help, but not at the price of his own life. The commander of the officials understood that if he gave Daniel and his friends what they wanted instead of the king’s choice food assigned to them, then at the end of the period they would not be as healthy and he would be held accountable for that.

Many vegetarians think they have a superior diet. Those that think they are spiritually superior for having such a diet have fallen for the devil’s lie. 2 Timothy 4:1-5 makes it clear that a religious requirement to abstain from foods is a doctrine of demons. God has created the various foods so “*be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.*” We just have to receive our food with gratitude. And as much as some vegetarians want to claim their diet is more healthy, the simple reality of nutrition is that it is not. Some claim if you will eat like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden you will be healthier. I agree. The problem is that man was kicked out of the garden so that is impossible. In addition, ever since the flood the nutrients in the soils have been leached out by rain resulting in plants that are not as nutritious. That is why in Genesis 9 God added animals to the list of foods man could consume. There are certain proteins we need to be healthy that are easily obtainable in animal meat but hard to get out of plants. Unless vegetarians are very careful, they will lack those proteins and not be as healthy.

The commander of the officials may not have understood all the reasons for it, but he did understand that those who ate only vegetables would not be as healthy as those eating the king’s choice food. Their lack of vigor would be easily discernable in how they looked and he did not want to put his life at risk. To calm his fears Daniel suggested a test. They would eat only vegetables and water for ten days after which the king’s official could compare their appearance with the other youths eating the king’s food and then decide if they could continue or not.

This test would require the Lord’s intervention for in order for this test to succeed the appearance of Daniel and his friends would have to be good enough to allow them to continue. At minimum there could be no discernable decline in their appearance, but that alone might only allow them to continue for the time being. The king’s official would still be vigilant to make sure there was no decline in their appearance in the future. They would have to appear as well or better for the test to succeed so that they could avoid violating the Mosaic dietary laws.

God's Answer - Daniel 1:14-16

Daniel 1:14–16 (LSB) ¹⁴ “So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that their appearance was better and that they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king’s choice food. ¹⁶ So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.”

God did bless Daniel and his friends. At the end of the ten day test, they not only had remained healthy, they actually looked better than the other youths having even put on some additional weight during that time. The result was that the overseer continued to allow them to have a diet that would avoid becoming defiled. Their diet of vegetables and water could include anything grown out of the ground. God honored their desire to be faithful to His commands. The Lord also honored their humble manner in seeking this diet by giving them favor with the king’s official. The Lord would continue to bless them through the whole training period and afterward.

God's Blessings - Daniel 1:17-21

Daniel 1:17–21 (LSB) ¹⁷ “And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and insight in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Then at the end of the days which the king had spoken of for bringing them in, the commander of the officials brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; so they stood in service before the king. ²⁰ And as for every matter of wisdom in understanding which the king sought from them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his kingdom. ²¹ And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.”

At the end of the three years of training, Daniel along with Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were far superior to all the others in every way. No one else even came close for the king even found them to be ten times better than the current magicians and conjurers that were already serving him. These were the king’s wise men who advised him on various matters. They were men trained in Babylonian wisdom, their occultic religions and in astrology which was part of their religious superstitions. The wise men from the east that saw the star and came to Jerusalem at Jesus’ birth were magi. We will see a lot more of these magicians and conjurers in other chapters of Daniel. Some of their abilities would have been demonically empowered, but since they claimed abilities and powers beyond what they actually had, they were schemers who the king did not really trust, which is why he would at times put them to the test to catch them in their lies.

Daniel and his friends would have stood out as a clear contrast to these men not only in their intellectual abilities and wisdom given to them by God at a young age, but also by their honesty and integrity. Whether the King knew about their commitment to keep God’s commandments or not, he was the beneficiary of that because now he had four men he could trust with important matters of his kingdom and he did so.

Verse 17 also points out that the Lord gave Daniel the ability to understand visions and dreams. This ability would become crucial in his service to the king as we shall see next week in our study of chapter 2, but also in giving to us an understanding of the events that are to occur in the future.

Verse 21 concludes with the remark that Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king. This is a simple statement that Daniel served in the Babylonian government throughout the remainder of its existence.

Conclusions

Daniel and his friends were young when they were captured and deported, but they already possessed the key characteristics that would make them important in their service within the Babylonian kingdom and in Biblical history. Though young and inexperienced, they were confident in their belief in

God and absolutely committed to following the Lord even in a foreign realm. It was out of their belief in God and commitment to serve Him first and foremost that every other good characteristic flowed.

That is the challenge to all the young people here as well as the adults. They knew the word of God well enough to recognize its application in their lives even in a foreign realm. They resisted the peer pressure and humbly sought to obey the Lord even when it would seem counterproductive to their own good. They simply stepped forward to do what they knew was right and left the result in the Lord's hands. If those same characteristics are in place in your own life, you can follow their example regardless of what pressures may be placed on you to compromise your faith whether that be at school, work, among friends or family. Believe what God has said. Step out in faith to humbly do what is right before Him. Leave the results in His hands. If you do that, you will be wiser than all your peers and better than those who are professed to be wise, for you will have a godly character. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:25, *"the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."*

Sermon Notes - 5/28/2023
THE CHARACTER OF GODLY TEENS - Daniel 1:1-21

Introduction

_____ is being extended through High School & College – and many graduates still refuse to grow up

Thankfully, there are still many exceptions of young adults who are _____

Daniel and his friends were _____ in their generation

Jerusalem is Captured - Daniel 1:1-2

All Judean kings after Josiah were _____

The prophecies were fulfilled and Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in _____ B.C.

The Captured Youths - Daniel 1:3-4

Nebuchadnezzar selected youths from royal families to train to be his surrogates in ruling conquered nations

“youth” (נַעֲרִים / yeled) children and young adolescents in which he could instill _____ ways & loyalty

Beware of those seeking to turn your teens away _____ to secularism

These royal / noble youths had to be _____ fit

They had to have _____ ability

They had to be competent _____ before the king – follow royal etiquette

They were trained in Chaldean language and _____

The King's Provision - Daniel 1:5

The king's “_____ food” was part of their training designed to gain their loyalty as well as keep them healthy

They would receive training for _____ years before entering the king's service

Four Faithful Teens - Daniel 1:6-7

Daniel = “_____ is my judge” Belteshazzar = “Bel protect his life”

Hananiah = “_____ has been gracious” Shadrach = “Command of Aku”

Mishael – “Who is like _____” Meshach = “Who is like Aku”

Azariah = “_____ has helped” Abednego = “Servant of Nebo”

Daniel's Resolve & Request - Daniel 1:8-13

The new situation for these youths would have been very _____ in many ways

The text does not state why, but Daniel recognized the king's choice food and wine would _____ him

Daniel did not want to defile himself – but he was a _____

Daniel made an _____ instead of just being defiant. He put the matter in God's hands

The commander was favorable to Daniel, but also _____

Vegetarianism is _____ a superior diet – Genesis 9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Daniel suggested a _____ that would require the Lord's intervention to work

God's Answer - Daniel 1:14-16

God blessed Daniel & his friends so that they were _____ than those eating the king's choice food

God's Blessings - Daniel 1:17-21

At the end of three years of training, they were _____ in every way – including being trustworthy

God also gave Daniel the ability to _____ visions and dreams

Conclusions

Daniel & his friends were young, but they already possessed the key characteristics to be successful

They knew & trusted _____

Our young people face the same challenge to resolve to know & _____ God in the midst of an ungodly culture

KIDS CORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God's Word to your children's lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch.

Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up later. 2) Count how many times "Daniel" is mentioned. Talk with your parents about what qualities he and his three friends had that made them godly examples to follow.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. What evidences have you observed that a large number of young adults do not want to grow up and take on adult responsibilities? Name some young adults that you know that show great maturity for their age. When were Daniel & his friends captured and taken to Babylon? About how old could they have been? Why did the king want to take Jewish youths and educate them? What qualifications did they need to meet to be included in this training? Why were each of these qualifications important? Why were the names of Daniel and his friends changed? What are some possible reasons Daniel believed the king's food would defile him? Can Daniel 1 be used to advocate vegetarianism? Why or why not? Is vegetarianism a superior diet? Why or why not? Why did God allow for the consumption of meat starting in Genesis 9. How did Daniel's test require him to trust God? What godly characteristics did Daniel and his friends demonstrate as they sought a way to avoid the king's food? How can you demonstrate those same characteristics in your own life? How did God bless Daniel and his friends? What lessons can be learned from this story about Daniel and his friends? Why are those lessons important for a youth?