

LIVING IN BABYLON

Devotional | January 29, 2023

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: When have you stood for Christ in a place or situation where it took faith and courage to do so?

Key Text: Read *Daniel 1:1-21*

Eric Liddell had trained for months for the upcoming 100-meter race at the 1924 Olympics, and many sportswriters predicted he would win. However, just days before his race, Liddell learned that his race was scheduled to be run on a Sunday. This was a problem for Liddell as he had a personal conviction that it would not honor God if he competed on a Sunday. Facing intense pressure from many to change his mind – some of whom had praised him in the past and were now calling him a fool – Liddell stood firm and refused to compromise. Then a runner dropped out of the 400-meter race scheduled on a weekday, and Liddell was invited to fill the slot. Even though it was four times longer than the race he had trained for, Liddell accepted the opportunity and crossed the finish line as victor, setting a record of 47.6 seconds. Eric Liddell had earned an Olympic gold medal, but more importantly, he had made an uncompromising stand for his faith. Liddell went on to become a missionary in China. He was interned at a war camp where he continued to put his faith into action among his fellow prisoners and the guards. In 1945, Liddell died of a brain tumor before the end of the war – his passing was mourned around the world. Eric Liddell's story of faith and courage continues to inspire.

Today we begin a new eight-part series called "Living in the Babylon." We'll focus on the life of Daniel, an Old Testament follower of God who, like Eric Liddell, courageously stood by his convictions and faithfully served the Lord in difficult circumstances.

1. When Jerusalem is conquered by the enemy Babylon, young exiles Daniel and his friends are selected to be indoctrinated for public service in Babylon (1:1-7).

In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, attacked and conquered Jerusalem (1:1-2). Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, his chief official, to select the most promising Jewish captives for three years of training for public service in Babylon (1:3-5). Among those chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (1:6-7).

Discuss: What key words and phrases about Daniel's character and conduct stand out to you in Daniel 1:3-4, 8; 6:4?

2. Daniel and his friends are told to eat the king's food and wine, but they are determined not to compromise their convictions about God's dietary laws (1:8).

Ashpenaz orders Daniel and his friends to eat the king's food and wine (1:5), but Daniel asks permission to eat other, healthier food (1:8) so as to not defile himself by violating the dietary laws prescribed in Leviticus 11. Daniel wanted to maintain his Jewish identity as much as possible even though he now lived in Babylon.

Discuss: What key words and phrases about being a Christian in an unbelieving world do you see in these verses: Matthew 6:24; Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-16?

3. Ashpenaz is reluctant, so Daniel tactfully suggests a 10-day test to see who would fare better: he and his friends eating a God-honoring menu or those eating the king's food and wine (1:9-14).

Ashpenaz is afraid he will be executed if the Jewish captives look unhealthy after eating from God's menu (1:8, 10). But God had granted Daniel favor (1:9), so with humility and grace Daniel suggested a test in which he and his friends would eat from God's menu while the others ate the king's food and wine. At the end of the ten days, Ashpenaz could determine who looked better and healthier and then deal with them as he saw fit (1:11-14).

Discuss: According to these verses, in what ways does the Bible benefit us: Psalm 19:7-8, 11; John 8:32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12?

Discuss: What key words and phrases do you see in 1 Peter 3:15 regarding how we should respond when matters of our beliefs come up?

4. Ashpenaz agrees to the test, and ten days later Daniel and his friends are healthier than the rest (1:15-16).

Ashpenaz allows the test, and at the end of the ten-day challenge, Daniel and his three friends looked noticeably better and healthier than the other men who had eaten from the king's table. Ashpenaz allowed them to continue to follow God's menu (4:15-16).

Discuss: Read James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7. According to these passages, what blessings can we enjoy as a result of tested faith?

5. At the conclusion of their training three years later, King Nebuchadnezzar declares that the four Hebrew men are ten times smarter than all the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom (1:17-21).

After their three years of training were done, King Nebuchadnezzar interviewed Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In every matter of wisdom and understanding, Nebuchadnezzar declared them to be ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom (1:17-20). Even though they were forced into difficult circumstances by exile and had much to learn about the Babylonian life and culture, the four Jewish young men studied and learned so they could glorify God. We are told in 1:17 that God also gave Daniel the ability to understand and interpret dreams, a foreshadowing of Daniel's ministry for the rest of the Book of Daniel. Daniel now begins his service in Babylon government (1:21).

Discuss: What key words and phrases do you see in Matthew 5:13-14 and Romans 12:21 regarding the influence we Christians are to have upon the world?

For Further Study:

Free online commentary on the Book of Daniel at www.enduringword.com

"Who Was Daniel in the Bible?" article at www.gotquestions.org

A Guide to Christian Ambition and the Desire to Influence the World by Hugh Hewitt