

Daniel's Excellence In Exile



By Ben Godwin

Daniel was uprooted from his homeland as a P.O.W. and relocated to Babylon as a teenager. It's believed that he was a descendant of King Hezekiah, thus a Prince of Judah (2 Kings 20:17-18). Daniel was probably a eunuch (Daniel 1:3-7) and so he never mentioned a wife or children.

His name means "God is my Judge." This matches a major theme in His writings—God has the final verdict in the affairs of men. Daniel's visions describe earthly kingdoms as pawns on God's chessboard, which He maneuvers to fulfill His will. Benjamin Franklin said, "...The longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men...." Like a master maestro, He orchestrates global events to serve His purpose. With all the chaos in the world today, it's reassuring to know that God is still in control.

Daniel served in high levels of government during Israel's 70-year Babylonian captivity. Exile is "A prolonged absence from one's own homeland." But even though Daniel was in exile, he still exhibited excellence. "...Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him...." (Daniel 6:3) In a sense, we are also in exile because we don't belong to this world. This is merely our temporary home. The same God who enabled Daniel to excel is with us. Consider four excellent qualities Daniel possessed:

1. Character. Daniel is one of a few Bible characters with no major flaw on his record. He was a politician without a scandal. How refreshing is that? In fact, his enemies spied on him and tried to dig up dirt to tarnish his reputation "But they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him" (Daniel 6:4). The only "fault" they found was that he prayed too much. Daniel was a man of impeccable character and integrity both publicly and privately.

Character is a determination to do what is right no matter what the cost. Character, like the foundation of a house, is below the surface. Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooten said, "Your character is more important than your reputation. Your character is what you really are; your reputation is only what people think you are." If we watch our character our reputation will take care of itself.

Character is formed when we choose to do right when given the opportunity to do

wrong. Every day we are presented with opportunities to sin. When we resist temptation, character is the result. Daniel proved that we can live clean lives in a corrupt culture.

2. Conviction. Conviction often involves doing what is not popular or not doing what is popular. Conviction means you have set boundaries for your life. Some things are morally right; others are morally wrong. The old saying goes, “Take a stand for something or you will fall for anything.” Daniel had conviction and it compelled him to take an unpopular stand. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank....” (Daniel 1:8)

King Nebuchadnezzar trained his captives for leadership with a three-year crash course on Chaldean culture. They learned the language, arts, sciences, religion, and the ways of Babylon. He spared no expense feeding and training these future leaders. But the “unclean” food violated Daniel’s convictions so he requested a simple diet of vegetables and water. (Many churches today still utilize this “Daniel Fast.”) After ten days, He and his comrades looked healthier than those eating the palace menu and remained on their diet. Daniel followed his convictions rather than the crowd. What if he had gorged himself on the king’s gourmet? There would be no book of Daniel for us to read because there would be no story to tell. Daniel dared to be different and God honored him for it. As Jiminy Cricket told Pinocchio, “Let your conscience be your guide.”

3. Courage. Daniel’s jealous enemies tricked King Darius into signing a bogus law that prohibited petitions to any God or man except him for thirty days. Violators would be thrown into a den of hungry lions. The trap was set and they waited for him to take the bait. Daniel ignored this law without fearing the fallout. It takes courage to disobey a law knowing it may cost your position or even your life. But when they outlawed prayer, he prayed anyway!

One author wrote, “Courage is not the absence of fear but the conquering of fear.” Someone else said, “Courage is fear that has said its prayers.” Courage is the fortitude to do what is right no matter what the cost. Normally, Christians should obey the law and strive to be model citizens. However, there are exceptions when laws violate our conscience and are contrary to God’s Word. In such cases, we need the courage to obey God rather than man. Another author noted, “The lions showed no interest in Daniel. Why should they? He was nothing but backbone and grit.”

4. Consistency. When King Darius realized his folly jeopardized Daniel’s life, he was distraught. Unable to reverse the absurd law, Darius ordered Daniel to the lion’s den. Notice what he said, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you” (Daniel 6:16). Daniel made such an impression with his consistent faith and lifestyle that Darius knew God would save him somehow. Consistency is the hard part of Christianity. It’s hard to do anything three times a day besides eat. But Daniel prayed three times per day and consistently lived out his faith.

Success usually results from a lifetime of diligence, discipline, and making wise

decisions. If you keep doing the right thing, eventually you'll be rewarded. God rewarded Daniel's faithfulness and spared him from the lions. Then King Darius wrote, "I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God...." (Daniel 6:26)

It's remarkable how God used one P.O.W. to influence an entire empire. Daniel dared to be different and what a difference he made! The same God is with us. He will use us too—if only we strive for excellence in exile.

Ben Godwin pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church.
He has authored two books available at Amazon.com or at Bengodwin.org.
He also hosts a weekly telecast called "The Word Workshop."
This article was recently featured in Ben's column in the *Daily Mountain Eagle*,
a newspaper based in Jasper, Alabama.