

Studies in Daniel #4 – Obedience and Loyalty to God

The overall theme of Daniel is: **God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.** Dan. 4:3, 4:34, 6:26, 7:14, 7:27, Ps. 145:13

In the first three lessons, we looked at who God is: that God is the source of wisdom and knowledge, the revealer of secrets, that he is an absolute sovereign, and that he has an eternal kingdom. Now we will see what the book of Daniel has to say about man's responsibility.

Theme #4: The duty of absolute obedience and loyalty to God, regardless of cost

Story 1: Daniel and three friends would not defile themselves with the king's meat (chapter 1)

Lesson: God's commands are to be obeyed even when it is inconvenient, or outside of the original context.

They were committed to following the dietary restrictions of God, even in a strange land. They could have rationalized, and said "We are no longer in Judah, we have no temple or functioning priesthood or sacrificial system, and we are serving in the king's palace, being educated and trained to serve the Chaldeans. Why should we continue to obey the dietary laws of Moses?"

They had no control over any of these circumstances in which they found themselves, and yet they could make a stand, however seemingly insignificant to those around them, concerning what they ate. They requested what appears to be a vegetarian diet, not because the Mosaic laws forbade meat, but certain kinds of meat. Also there was a proper way to kill and butcher the animals, which would not be followed in Babylon, so they opted to stick with "pulse" (vegetables and probably grains). There was a risk however, that such a diet would in the natural tend to make them sickly, and bring retribution from the king. They obtained permission for a trial period, and God rewarded their obedience with good health.

This does not mean we should be vegetarians – that is outside the scope of this lesson, but it does mean that God demands, and will honor, obedience in matters of conscience and the word.

Current applications:

- Do your parents' and church's teachings and instruction no longer apply if you are in college? Can you live like all the unregenerates around you and think it is OK?
- Is it OK to misbehave when you are away from home and it is unlikely that friends and family will find out? e.g. a man on a business trip, going to Hooters or some bar, boozing it up and having "female companionship"? Or Amish people going to Florida and doing things they couldn't get away with at home? "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" is not a valid rule for Christian morality.
- Can you do something morally objectionable just because it a requirement of the job? One time I politely but firmly refused to formulate a printing ink that was to be used for Playboy magazine. Thankfully I did not lose my job.

Story 2: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace (chapter 3)

Lesson: We must refuse to worship false gods

Nebuchadnezzar set up an image, 90 feet tall, and ordered that everyone should worship it upon hearing the music. To refuse meant death by being burned in a furnace. These three Hebrews refused, even after being given a final chance to submit. They stood firm in refusing to bow down, having faith that God would deliver them, but if he didn't, death was preferred to such

submission. Their obedience was rewarded by supernatural deliverance from the fire, and they were even accompanied in the fire by one whose appearance was “like the Son of God” (the pre-incarnate Christ).

Today, many would go ahead and bow down without really meaning it, or say they “have their fingers crossed”. But whether you mean it or not, such action would be a public testimony of a lie, and a denial of Christ. Mt. 10:32-33 – “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

Story 3: Daniel in the lion’s den (chapter 6)

Lesson: We must refuse to stop worshipping the true God

Daniel had been elevated by king Darius above all the “presidents and princes” of the Persian empire, and not surprisingly, had many enemies below him. They hatched a scheme to get rid of him. They knew no accusation of wrong-doing would be credible, so they laid a trap for him to incriminate himself through his own virtue. They tricked the king into making an irreversible proclamation that any appeal to any god or man for 30 days, besides Darius himself, would be a capital offense punishable by being thrown to lions. As they expected, Daniel ignored the edict, and they “ratted him out” to the king. Not even Darius could retract one of his edicts (!), so the sentence was carried out. God supernaturally delivered Daniel. Darius realized it was a setup, so he threw Daniel’s schemers to the lions.

I think Daniel knew the edict was a trap, and that it was born of jealousy, but he did not allow himself to be intimidated into acquiescence. He went on just as before, knowing that it could mean his life.

Most people would say “I will just pray silently, in my heart”, or “It is just for 30 days, I will ride it out and then go back to normal”.

Other examples, outside the book of Daniel

- a. Joseph with Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 39) – Joseph rejected her advances when in all probability he could have gotten away with it (at least for a while). He valued moral purity and faithfulness (to God, and to Potiphar her husband) even above sexual gratification.
- b. Peter and John refused to stop preaching/teaching in the name of Jesus (Ac. 4:8-20). They had been commanded to stop teaching in Jesus’ name, but they said “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Lk. 9:23-26 – “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.

Conclusion: We must put loyalty to God above all alternatives, and be faithful to the light we have, to the best of our ability, even at the cost of reputation, job, family, or even our lives.