

Sermon: How to Thrive at College; Delivered by: Dr. Josh Moody, senior pastor;
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Bible text explored: Daniel 1:1–21

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, 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 placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. ²¹And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. [ESV]

Review and application

1. This is an especially relevant text for students launching their college years. From what protected environment are they being detached?
What differing perspective and pressures will they encounter?
How will the character they are forming be put to the test?
2. What are some personal and/or corporate junctures at which we are all also challenged to take a stand for God?
3. The Babylonian exile appeared an utter disaster for Israel, but who (vv. 1-2) was in ultimate control?
In what other ways (vv. 9, 17) is God declared to be in control?
4. How intense (vv. 3-6) was the indoctrination program to which these candidates for government leadership positions were being subjected?*

*Their Hebrew names, with references to God, were replaced by names linked to Babylonian deities:

Daniel = God is my judge → Belteshazzar = Bel protects his life

Hananiah = the LORD is grace → Shadrach = command of Aku

Mishael = who is God? → Mesach = who is Aku?

Azariah = the LORD helps → Abednego = servant of Nego

5. How could this new “political correctness” have overwhelmed biblical thinking?
How (vv. 7-14) did Daniel find a way to respectfully resist it?
How (vv. 15-16) did God honor the stand he took?
6. Pastor Moody declared that spiritual public success is based on previous private decisions.
How did these four youths (vv. 17-21) confirm this?
7. How can we, without compromising, select the issues on which to make a stand?