

Explore the Bible: Integrity Established

January 10, 2022

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 23 focuses on Daniel 1:8-21.*

Integrity has been defined in various ways, but perhaps my favorite definition is “doing what is right whether anyone knows it or not.” Many times when we hear this definition, we focus on the part about doing what’s right when no one knows we are doing it. Indeed, there is virtue to doing the right thing when there is no possibility of “getting credit” for your behavior. It demonstrates that at the heart of the decision was a commitment grounded in right.

Sometimes, however, the statement finds emphasis on doing the right thing when others do know about it. Those who hold different values than you, especially those who hold some form of power over you, can often make doing the right thing more difficult. The more imposing the opposition and the more costly the consequences, the more difficult it becomes to hold to the standards God has outlined for his people.

As we begin a series of lessons in the book of Daniel, we encounter four young men who were taken into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. These young men were selected as human tribute from noble families to the new empire of Babylonia. The loss to this empire and the subsequent enslavement of many of Jerusalem’s youngest and finest no doubt left many doubts in the minds of Israelites about the sufficiency of God.

The book of Daniel goes to great lengths to demonstrate God is still on his throne and still very much in control. The circumstances of loss and testing that the four young men—and all Israel, for that matter—find themselves

in, would test their resolve to have faith and walk in integrity.

A Commitment Expressed (Daniel 1:8-10)

Daniel 1 opens with a reminder that Israel had lost to Babylon because God had given Jerusalem into their hands (Daniel 1:2). This statement reveals the reality of a situation in direct contrast to the appearances of it. No doubt, Daniel and his three friends had questions about what this new dynamic would mean to them. The situation presented many difficult decisions for them, and as the chapter unfolds, it looks like they had to make choices about what they would and wouldn't participate in.

The first chapter says they were trained in the ways of the Babylonians—literally, “the Chaldeans” (Daniel 1:4), which involved an introduction to the literature, thought and practices of the wise men of Babylon. Among these lessons and reading undoubtedly were references to practices and beliefs antithetical to God's laws and instructions. Despite this, they participated.

Additionally, the text says that they were put under the care of the chief of the eunuchs, and we know historically that Babylon made a practice of turning captives into eunuchs upon their capture. Indeed, Isaiah promised Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:18 predicted his descendants would be taken to Babylon and turned into eunuchs. It would seem that Daniel and his friends were turned into eunuchs. Such an action would have placed them outside the assembly of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:1).

But Daniel and his friends didn't draw the line with either of these two challenges to their orthodoxy, instead they decided they would not eat the food that the king had offered them. Why draw the line here? Integrity first begins in what we believe about ourselves and the God we serve. The

dietary commitment that Daniel and his friends commit to is as much about confirming in their hearts and mind that God is in control as it is demonstrating something to the Babylonians. Indeed, as far as the story goes, only two of the Babylonians (the chief and his guard) even know about the commitment or test. Integrity always matters, but knowing the difference between compromise that allows the message to be preached and compromise that cost us our witness is essential to our journey.

A Test Passed (Daniel 1:11-16)

The period of training was to last three years. Daniel reasonably asks for a mere 10 days out of that time to test whether their commitment was well conceived or not. As this was a test for Daniel and his friends' thoughts as well, the time would demonstrate quickly whether their faith was well-placed or not. In many senses, it wasn't just Daniel and his friends' integrity that was being demonstrated, but God's. His faithfulness to their commitment here sets the stage for their integrity in other stories as well.

A Recognized Difference (Daniel 1:17-21)

The test pays off. Daniel and his friends' faith in God reaps great rewards. Some of what the king says about their qualities here has already been demonstrated in their decision-making process. It wasn't the diet itself that was essential in the outcome, it was the balance of integrity and wisdom that made a difference.

As far as we can tell from the story, the king never knew of their diet change, but the four young men did. Here they show integrity in their willingness to do what's right when no one (or very few) knew about it. In future stories, their integrity will be more openly challenged when

everyone knows of their commitments. In both cases, it's God's integrity that shines through and where our confidence must ultimately be placed.

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