

The Life Without Compromise

In 1924, Eric Liddell was a devout Christian who made the British Olympic Athletics team as their 100 meter sprinter. When he found out that one of the heats for the Paris Olympics would be held on a Sunday, he withdrew from the event altogether. He shocked everyone. He chose to train instead for the 400 metres, an event which was not his speciality. When the day of the 400 metres race came, Liddell went to the starting blocks, where an American Olympic Team masseur slipped a piece of paper into his hand with a quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30: "Those who honour me I will honour." He ran it, and won. God gave him the gold medal he deserved, and he got it without compromise. Later, Eric Liddell went to China as a missionary and in 1945 he died there in a war camp.

Liddell was a man who lived not by what was convenient, but by conviction. Liddell's was a life without compromise. Compromise is a good thing when two parties make concessions so as to settle an argument. Compromise is a bad thing when you give up what is pleasing to God so as to make life smoother for yourself. To do what you know is wrong, simply to get what you want. That's compromise.

It's becoming harder and harder to find Christians, and indeed churches, who will not compromise. On every side, we find churches who are willing to give up large portions of their doctrine to win admiration and acceptance from the world. We find Christians who are willing to compromise on matters like whether Christ is the only way, whether perversion of biblical marriage is a sin, whether the Bible is verbally inspired. Churches are willing to make compromises in areas of worship and personal morals, so as to appeal to popular culture and win hearts. And more than ever, Christians are tempted to compromise – to blend in with the world, give up something they believe or practice, so as to avoid ridicule, persecution or personal loss. Amongst God's people, the one's who live without compromise always seem to be the minority.

Daniel is one such jewel in God's treasure box of non-compromisers. Daniel 1 introduces us to Daniel and his companions and helps us to understand how he was so elevated in Babylon, and why God favoured him with such visions. Daniel 1 is all about a life of no compromise. The account unfolds by firstly showing us that there was a context, a situation in which compromise was easy. We then see how there was an elaborate plan to cause their compromise. We see the great conflict this produced, and we'll then see the decision Daniel made, and its consequences.

Daniel and his companions found themselves in a situation where compromise would have been very easy. The way events unfolded this was a situation that was ripe for compromise. It was an incubator for compromise. In verses 1-3 we see the context for compromise.

I. The Context For Compromise

Daniel 1:1 *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*

As we mentioned last week, the book of Daniel opens with a scene of Judah's defeat. After many years of idolatry, God judged and disciplined Judah by sending Babylon to defeat it in 605 B.C.

Daniel calls it the third year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah calls it the fourth year. The reason for that is that Daniel was using the Babylonian dating system, where the first year of a king wasn't counted – it was his year of accession. Jeremiah used the Jewish dating system. But they're saying the same

thing.

Nebuchadnezzar on the way back from defeating Egypt, stopped at Jerusalem. Jerusalem basically opened its gates to Nebuchadnezzar, and he did not harm them, with the exception that he plundered some things from the Temple, and took some captives.

² *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.*

When one nation would conquer another, one of the things it would do would be to plunder the religious temples of the god of that nation, and take the items back to the temple of its god. Because when you are able to attack a nation, and get into the temple and desecrate it and take the images and furniture out, and then put it into the temple of your god, whose god is stronger? Obviously yours. Your god gave you the power to conquer that nation, which means your god is stronger than their god. So when Nebuchadnezzar plundered the Temple in Jerusalem, he was saying, my god Marduk is stronger than your god, Yahveh. Your god Yahveh could not stop me from conquering you, and entering your holy places. Nebuchadnezzar takes some items (not all) to Shinar, which was the old word for the area surrounding Babylon. It was also a way of taking out some insurance – if you have some of this god in your land, perhaps he will help you out some day.

Israel could not believe this would ever happen. This was a scene of total disgrace and defeat. And that's not all they took:

³ *Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles,*

The Babylonians did not simply wipe out the people they conquered. They would select the elites from among the people, and bring them back to Babylon. The goal was to win these elites over to Babylon, to change their loyalties, to cause them to compromise in some way, and then to send them back.

Different nations had different methods for dealing with the nations they conquered. The kingdom before Babylon – the Assyrians used intermarriage to defeat opposition. The kingdom after Babylon, the Persians, tried to please its conquered people, e.g., they allowed the Jews to return and build Jerusalem. The empire of Greece would Hellenize its conquered people – spreading Greek culture and language to its conquered nations. The empire of Rome would simply crush any who opposed, and give peace to those who submitted. But Babylon's method was to select the leaders, take them back to Babylon, brainwash them in Babylonian thinking, and then send them back to their countries to rule on Babylon's behalf. That way, you deprived the remnant in the land of leadership, and when the leadership came back, they were loyal to Babylon.

So Nebuchadnezzar instructs Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuch to do just that. The word *eunuch* can also mean official. Potiphar is referred to by this title in Genesis. Regardless of what Ashpenaz was, he was instructed to bring some of the children of Israel, some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles. The word here for *children* used for very young men (2 Kings 2:24, 2 Chron 10:8). Probably Daniel and his peers were around 15 years old when taken. Probably about 70-80 such young men were taken to Babylon in this first captivity.

Here is the context for compromise. Daniel and his companions have been removed from all that is familiar. They are in a foreign land with foreign gods. Judging by faithless appearance, it seems as

if Marduk has beaten Yahveh. Best we can tell, Daniel does not have his parents, or Israelite religious leaders hovering over his shoulder. He is in enemy territory, and the enemy is in the majority and seems to have the upper hand. If he compromises, very few people are going to notice.

That's a lot like believers today. Our world is not a Christian world. The god of this world system is Satan. What controls the media and the politics and the economics and the societal norms are not biblical truths, but ideas which support a world system hostile to Christianity. If you choose to compromise, you don't really stand out, you just join the majority. If you compromise your belief in the gospel, if you compromise your standards of honesty, speech, moral purity, if you compromise in the area of what you let your eyes see, and what you choose to listen to, and how you dress, you don't stand out; you blend in.

But it is not simply a hostile environment that these ancient believers faced, and which we face, there is more.

II. The Conspiracy to Compromise

Daniel the name BeltesDaniel 1:3-7 ³ Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴ young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵ And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. ⁶ Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷ To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Ahazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

The Babylonians had a very specific plan to get these Jewish boys to compromise, to change loyalties, to conform to Babylonian thinking and acting:

Firstly, they selected them according to their worldly values.

⁴ young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

Look at that list of three. First, these young men were without blemish but good-looking. They looked for handsome, attractive, good-looking men. They wanted men who could be paraded in front of the people; men whom the crowds would cheer at and make statues of.

Second, they were to be men possessing knowledge and quick to understand. These men had to have some education and some ability to think. They were looking for bright, smart men. Not just a pretty face, but some good brains in there too. And when you have both a handsome exterior, and a sharp mind, well, this is a winning combination.

Third, they had to have ability to stand before the king. This means they had a certain amount of social skills. They would not make foolish jokes and laugh like a nerd at the wrong time. They needed to have a certain amount of poise and social graces.

So these are the criteria Babylon uses: get the best looking, smartest, suavest boys you can find, bring them while they young, we'll melt them down, pour them into a Babylonian mould, and send them back to win the hearts and minds of their own people.

Not much has changed, has it? The first way the world judges you is by your appearance. We are all supposed to be beautiful, handsome, pretty, dashing if we want to fit in. We celebrate the super-intelligent, and we admire the witty, socially suave.

Did you see anything in there about character? Anything in there about spiritual maturity? No, that's not what the Babylonians valued. They selected you according to these values. And if you were chosen; if you were amongst the elites brought over from the defeated ruin of Jerusalem to the palaces of Babylon, how do you think you would feel? What part of you would it appeal to? Pride. "Wow! The powerful Babylonian empire selected me. They like me. I belong. I am someone special. I'm one of the good-looking ones. I'm one of the smart and suave ones.

And when the world wants to make you feel that you belong, and that you are 'in', what do they typically look for? Spiritual maturity? Character? What sorts of things do they celebrate on their magazine covers and in their storefronts and in their movies? What kinds of things do they invite you to pursue?

So the first part of the conspiracy to compromise was the appeal to pride and appeal to acceptance by the Babylonians system.

But there was a second part to this conspiracy to compromise:

and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

The Babylonians set about teaching these men over three years the Babylonian knowledge base. These men were essentially in the Bachelor of Babylonialism course. And there was a lot to learn. The Babylonians had vast amounts of literature – huge libraries of works on astronomy, mathematics, agriculture, mythology, to say nothing of their religions, their gods, with all the astrology and magic and hymnody that went with it. They were going to be taught the language of Babylon – which was a kind of Akkadian. By the end of this course, these men would ideally be overwhelmed with how much they now knew, and how primitive and quaint and simple-minded their old Jewish beliefs had seemed.

It reminds me of when many a young Christian man or woman goes off to high school and especially university, and they are bombarded with theories. Theories of evolution, supposed contradictions in the Bible, comparative religion, social anthropology, psychology to explain our guilt and internal emotional unrest. And not a few young men and women have lost their faith after a good three or four years of that. You don't have to go to places of higher learning, just switch on the TV or listen to the radio talk shows or read the columns and you will hear a modern version of the conspiracy to compromise. Just relax your narrow views. Surrender your high view of Scripture. Relax your belief in one exclusive way to God. Surrender your idea of absolute truth.

The conspiracy to compromise assaults our hearts by enticing us to love what the world loves. It assaults our minds by trying to reshape what we know and believe.

But there was a third plank in Nebuchadnezzar's plan to cause these men to compromise:

⁵ *And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.*

Here these Hebrew boys, probably used to a rather plain diet, are given a buffet feast from the king every day. The Babylonian kings and nobles were noted for luxurious living. Their tables were

loaded with wheat breads, meats in great variety and luscious fruits. Wine would have been flowing in excess.

And all this adds up to a kind of bribery. Their resistance is being worn down as they are daily delighted by exotic dishes. They are being kept healthy and strong at the king's expense. But behind all this would be an ulterior motive – to invite these Jewish boys to compromise their religion. According to the Law of Moses in Exodus 23:19, 34:26, Leviticus 11 and 17:10-16 and Deuteronomy 14:3-20, food could be defiled in several ways. If it was slaughtered in the wrong way, it was defiled. If it was prepared in the wrong way, it was defiled. And if it belonged to the class of animals that were unclean, it was defiled.

The Babylonians no doubt knew that if they could persuade the Hebrews to eat food that was in one way or another defiled, they had caused them to give up a huge part of their devotion to God. It wasn't just about the food. It was about obedience to God. It was about maintaining their devotion to God even in a foreign land. The Babylonians were after the hearts, their minds, and their faith. But they did one other thing – they tried to change their identity.

6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

In renaming them, they were re-identifying them, and seeking to change their religious commitments. They were brainwashing them in the most profound way- your old identity is gone. You are not even known by that name here. Daniel, which means God is my judge, was renamed *Belteshazzar* "Baal's prince" or "May the Lady protect". Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious") was renamed Shadrach -- "Illumined by Ra". Mishael ("Who is what God is?") was renamed Meshach "Who is what Aku is? Azariah ("Yahweh helps") was renamed Abednego -- "Servant of Nabu (the shining one)"

It's just a masterful plan to transform these boys' loves, by appealing to pride and belonging; to transform their minds through education and indoctrination; to change their worship through diet, and to change their identities through new names.

It's a plan which has parallels today as Satan's world system tries to get you to conform, tries to change your mind about you know and believe; tries to get you to compromise your worship; tries to get you to identify with it rather than with God.

So here was a context for compromise, and an elaborate conspiracy to compromise, and that brought Daniel and his friends to the place of conflict.

III. The Conflict Over Compromise

The situation is one in which every believer will at some point face. To please the world, you have to do something to displease God. To please God, you have to displease the world. And that was exactly where Daniel found himself.

You see, simply being in Babylon didn't mean Daniel *had* to compromise. He could be faithful to God in another country. Learning the literature of the Babylonians didn't compromise his faithfulness to God. A lot of that knowledge was true, and what wasn't true, he could just filter out. Even changing his name didn't alter his commitment to God. You can call me whatever you want to; it doesn't change who I am and who I worship. But the diet confronted Daniel's devotion head-on.

To live and survive in Babylon, he needed to eat. But to eat would be to directly disobey the Word of God and compromise his faith. God hadn't said anything about being successful in Babylon. But He had said something about what foods Israelites were to eat.

Think of the real conflict here. This food had been ordered by the king. Disobedience to the king would incur a harsh penalty. If they weren't executed, they might be given the worst slave positions in the empire. Not only that, but it would seem silly to the supervisors. You're a million miles from Judah! Ordinary Babylonians would trample each other to have this kind of food! The food was tempting and no doubt tasty and healthy in itself. And if they did this, they would certainly be destroying their chances for promotion and advancement.

Not only that, but think of how many of Daniel's peers were partaking without any objections. When all the other so-called believers are involved in a compromise, it starts to make you feel like perhaps you're a legalist who has some very narrow and unnecessary convictions.

On top of that, there were no adults to restrain him. No priests, elders, prophets, or princes to forbid them. Their immediate overseers and authorities were encouraging them to eat. They would not get into trouble for eating. Can you imagine the thoughts that could have been running through their minds? "We need to be practical. No point in getting your head chopped off for the sake of a few dietary laws. We still love and know God. No need to get over-scrupulous here. Those laws were for when we were in the land. Everything has changed. The Temple has been destroyed. We must find new ways of being Jewish now that we are here. God knows our hearts. He knows that what we are eating isn't pure, but we do it because we are being forced to. After all, He allowed the Temple to be destroyed. He brought us here. It must be His will that we reluctantly partake."

So it is for you, believer. When you are encouraged to take that shortcut at work, or exaggerate in the presentation, or nudged to look at the picture on the cell-phone, or invited to a party, or enticed to drink or smoke, or take some drugs, or to take a job that crowds out the Lord, or to pretend that homosexual marriage is legitimate, or to agree that all religions are equally true, or to watch that filthy film, - there will be all kinds of reasons that seem to make the choice legitimate.

But let me ask you, what did fifteen year-old Daniel, almost alone in a pagan land, with all those reasons stacked in favour of compromise, what did he decide to do?

IV. The Commitment Without Compromise

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel purposed in his heart. You could say that the root of non-compromise is a firm internal commitment to please God no matter what. Internally, Daniel made this decision. He did not wait until peer pressure came to him. He did not wait to hear if the Babylonians might have a persuasive argument for eating defiled food. He made a choice ahead of time whom He served, whom He worshipped, and what he would therefore do and not do.

Mark it down believer, you will never survive the conspiracy to compromise unless you have purposed in your heart to love and please God, in spite of the consequences. Before you are enticed into premarital sex; before you are encouraged to take a few more sips; before you are offered a lucrative job that will take you completely out of church; you need to purpose in your heart.

One greater than Daniel did that. He was literally offered the kingdoms of this world. He was offered instant acclaim and worship but Jesus had purposed in His heart to obey His Father, no matter what. He had purposed to do His Father's will down to the punctuation marks, and not the greatest Tempter in the universe could cause Him to compromise.

I think of Martin Luther standing before the emperor and the Roman Catholic cardinal at the Diet of Worms and there called upon to recant his beliefs or face certain death. And his response: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."

So Daniel does his best to put his faith in God to work. His first stop is to request from the chief of the eunuchs not to defile himself. That's pretty bold – to tell the Babylonian you're under, that the luxurious food he's providing is actually defiled food, but Daniel was not ashamed of the Word of God.

Verse 9 tells us how that went:

⁹ Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. ¹⁰ And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

This man is not about to endanger his own life over some religious scruples of some Jewish teenager. He denies the request. But watch how wise and shrewd Daniel is:

¹¹ So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ "Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." ¹⁴ So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

Daniel goes to a subordinate overseer – someone with less rank than the chief of the eunuchs, and he proposes a ten day trial of eating only vegetables and water. A ten day test would be easier for the official to accept, and the results in appearance would be more remarkable.

You have to ask, how did Daniel know what would happen? How could he set up such a bold challenge? We don't know if God had put this into his heart or not. One thing he was sure of – it is never right to do the wrong thing. What drove Him is the truth that obedience to God is always blessed, no matter where you are. Daniel knew that even in Babylon, God reigns. Even in Babylon, Yahveh is the true God. Daniel knew the truth of Proverbs 15:3:

Proverbs 15:3 ³ *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.*

Or what the prophet Hanani had said to King Asa:

2 Chronicles 16:9 *"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*

What was the result of his challenge?

V. The Consequences of Commitment Without Compromise

¹⁵ And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. ¹⁶ Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

When the test is over, the four young men look healthier and plumper than all the others. And I think something miraculous was happening here. God blessed their obedience and showed the wisdom of it. The result was, their way was cleared to continue to worship and obey God in Babylon. God protected them. John MacArthur said, "You live an uncompromising life and you will enjoy an unearthly protection." The reason why so few experience that is because, at the point of conflict, they cave in and place their trust in Babylonians. Here is a great theological lesson: God is able and willing to protect His faithful children who refuse to compromise. He can provide you with money. He can provide you with a job. He can provide you with a spouse. He can provide you with children. He can provide you with what you need if it is His will. But He decides, and He tests our trust.

And the blessing extended beyond this test.

¹⁷ As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. ²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. ²¹ Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

Not only was there protection, there was also elevation. They were head and shoulders above their peers, and they did so without denying their Lord.

And ask yourself, what kind of boldness and increase in faith did those four young men experience as a result of this? When they chose no compromise and saw God's protection and God's promotion it could only have caused them to want to trust and honour God even more.

As long as we are on this side of eternity, we'll be called on to compromise. Not only as individuals but as a church. We'll be asked to stop preaching such an exclusive gospel. We'll be told to stop preaching on holiness and separation from the world. We'll be encouraged to compromise on our worship and join everyone else in using the world's sensual and sentimental and sloppy music to attract fans for Jesus. We'll be encouraged to compromise on our stands for personal purity, and dress and integrity and testimony before the world. What are we going to do?

Here's what we need to do, as individuals, as families, as a church. Ahead of time, we have to purpose in our hearts: our God is God everywhere. He does not change, and He sees all. He is great, and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

We need to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. Having done that, we choose not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may prove the perfect will of God.