

## **Faith and Protest in A Strange World**

### **Daniel 1:1-9**

It wasn't just the temple treasures Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon. He took Israel's greatest treasure – her youth.

#### **The Pressure of Culture**

In this passage we meet Daniel and his friends – who will become the key players in the first half of this book. In the midst of the rise and fall of empires, God has his hand on those who trust him.

The king chooses young, intelligent, good-looking people. It's a forerunner of our western cult of youth, image and charisma. They are to be taught to think and live as Babylonians. He does this by isolating them, immersing them in the culture, inviting them into his circle, and removing their identity, by renaming them. There are clear parallels with today: if we can change the way you think, then you'll agree with us and live like us. It's not just the young who are susceptible to this – we all are.

Daniel gives a telling example of how things worked: the changing of their names. Their original names testified to the God they worshipped. But their new names spoke of Babylon's idols. They were now to serve Nebuchadnezzar and his gods. Just as then, today God is squeezed out and replaced by modern idols.

And yet, rather than withdraw from their studies these young men engaged and graduated top of their class. But whilst they did not resist the changing of names, the time for resistance did come.

#### **A Line in the Sand**

Daniel and friends refuse the king's food. This was likely for a mix of reasons. He says it was so that they did not *defile* themselves. It was a reminder not to allow themselves to become ensnared by the temptations of Babylonian culture. They resolved not to compromise their loyalty to God, to gain access to the king's inner ring. Daniel prioritised purity over self-protection, pleasure and promotion. But to do so came with risk. His future was in the balance. But spiritual courage is forged in such small decisions.

Where was this resolve born? They had been raised in King Josiah's court, where a foundation of a commitment to the word of God and the centrality of living for the glory of God was laid in their lives. How can we find such resolve in our day?

#### **Set Apart Christ as Lord**

Peter wrote that we must set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts if we are to face suffering for our faith. We must decide ahead of time who will be our Lord. It must be Christ. Verse 9 tells us God gave Daniel favour. This can steel our hearts for commitment. We can live out lives of personal holiness, because God will give us the strength to do it. Daring to be a Daniel is not so much about daring to be different, as daring to be a disciple of Christ.

Jesus was also of the tribe of Judah, of the royal family, sent into our sinful world. He also prioritised holiness and God's glory. His moment of trial came in the garden – but he did take the king's cup: the cup of God's wrath that was ours to take. When we realise he risked everything for us, we will find the resolve to risk, and choose holiness, and seek God's glory, not our own.