

## Life in Exile: Cultural Christians vs. Remnant Christians

**Daniel 1:1-4, 6-7** ~*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia<sup>[a]</sup> and put in the treasure house of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility- 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. 6 Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.*

If you woke up tomorrow to find that the USA had been taken over and almost every Christian had been killed, and you were now immersed in a culture devoid of God, how do you think you would react?

Could you survive? What would be the most difficult part?

No churches, pastors, other believers (for the most part), bibles, etc. What would you miss the most?

What are the Christian things that you have now that you take for granted sometimes? Why do you think this is?

Side note: In Nehemiah 8:1-18 when they return they find the book of the law and Ezra reads from it for 6hrs straight starting at daybreak and everyone listens attentively!!! And they did this for 7 days straight!

**Dan 1:5, 9-14** ~*The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service...8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your<sup>[a]</sup> food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.*

What choice was he faced with here? Why was this recorded even recorded?

\*\*Daniel started following God a long time ago, but now is faced with that decision again. Will I chose to follow God today, right now, in this decision?

In Daniels day, it was a big deal to not eat defiled food. Not so much an issue for us today. What are the ways God calls us to “separate” ourselves from the culture? Give some specific examples.

Why are these little decisions such a big deal?

We pick up there story later in chapter 3

**Daniel 3:1-6 ~King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet<sup>[a]</sup> wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."**

Have you ever met a Christian who was a different person depending on who was around him? Why do you think this was?

If that person was living in exile how do you think he would have reacted to the situation above? Why?

How does the culture around us effect our daily decisions?

How should it?

What is the difference between a cultural Christian and a remnant Christian?

Which are you most like? How can you tell for sure?

**Daniel 3:8-15 ~At this time some astrologers<sup>[b]</sup> came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." 13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"**

Again, these men chose to follow God a long time ago, but are now faced with that choice all over again! How would you respond if you were in their situation? Why?

What is the most difficult decision you have ever had to make in regards to continue following God?

**Daniel 3:16-18 ~***Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

Would you still choose to follow God even if you knew there would be serious consequences?

Can you think of some situations (that we could actually face) in which this might happen?

Why is it so hard to follow God in these kinds of situations?

**Daniel 3:19-29 ~***Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." 25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." 26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"*

*So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. 28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."*

Is following God a one time choice?

How should the culture around us impact our commitment to God?

CONCLUSION: Following God is not a one time commitment, it starts there but it is a continuous decision that we must make over and over everyday for the rest of our lives. During the exile God was looking for people who would not fall away from him, for people who would stick with him even when things got difficult. The exile saw the death of roughly 90% of God's people and the remaining 10% were thrust into the same difficult situation and only about 1% would return. Their decisions, their choices made all the difference! The Exile was God's fatherly way of selecting a remnant for himself. That remnant was made up of those who responded to God with a life of obedience no matter what!

Self reflection questions:

- Given the statement: "You don't know what you got till its gone" What about God am I taking for granted right now?

- In what ways has God come through for me in the past? How can I make sure I never forget this!
- In what ways am I a cultural Christian?
- If I got throw into exile would I be more likely to be part of the remnant or to blend in with the culture around me?