

## The Test of Integrity

### Tests of God #3

#### Daniel 1

*Finally, my brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, and whatever is right – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned, or received, or heard – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

There is a word in the lexicon of our Christian vernacular that we use often and for a variety of different reasons. We use this word with our children because we want their lives to be defined by it. We use this word when discussing leadership because we know when certain leaders lack it and when certain leaders embody it. It's a word used in every vocation, at all levels of education, in all corridors of social affiliation, and in every area of expertise. But I highly doubt you've ever used it reference to a Test of God. You should. It's the word "integrity." He tests for it often because he desires "integrity" not just to be a fancy word in the lexicon of our Christian vernacular. He desires "integrity" to be a substantial word in the language of our hearts, actions, and attitudes.

Some theologians have called integrity doing the right thing when no one else is looking. But I call integrity doing the right thing – because it is the right thing before God – whether someone else is looking or not. There are four individuals in the Word of God who would agree. Their names were Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah and Belteshazzar. You know them as Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel. All four did the right thing because it was the right thing before God whether someone else was looking or not.

When Nebuchadnezzar carted them off to Babylon and tried his best to strip them of their faith and identity, they remained faithful to the Lord. That revealed the integrity of their character. When Daniel and his friends made the decision not to defile themselves regardless of the consequence, it revealed the integrity of their conscience. When they had to choose to obey the commands of King Nebuchadnezzar or the commands of King Jesus, they chose the commands of King Jesus. That choice revealed their integrity and commitment to the commands. And when they made the decision to do the right thing because it was the right thing before God regardless of who was watching, it revealed the integrity of their conduct. For in their test of integrity, God targeted their character, conscience, commitment to His commands, and their conduct. We can be sure he will in our lives also when the Test of Integrity comes. And we are going to see the Test of Integrity that Daniel and his friends took and passed in Daniel 1. But before we do, pray with me.

#### 1. Character

- **John Wooden on Character:** (1) "Be concerned more with your character than your reputation. For reputation is merely what others think about you. But character is not only who you really are. It's what God knows about you." (3) A test of integrity works just like that. It reveals who you really are at your core. It certainly did for Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- **Divinely Orchestrated (1:1-2):** *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> 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 and put in the treasure house of his god.*
- **Explanation:** Verses 1-2 describe the worst period in the lives of the people of God in the OT: The Babylonian Captivity. They lost their land; their temple; and their way of life. Everything was gone. Now they were in Babylon, a hostile place, with pagan temples and a pagan way of life. And it was all divinely orchestrated: "And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim into his hand."
- **Loyalty and Fidelity Threatened (1:3-5):** <sup>3</sup> *Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>5</sup> 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.*
- **Explanation:** Notice the emphasis on the king: "the king ordered" / "king's service" / "king's palace" / "king assigned" / "king's table" / "to enter the king's service." It's setting up the motif to do as the King demands, not as God says.
- **Identity Threatened (1:6-7):** <sup>6</sup> *Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.*
- **Explanation:** Daniel (God is my judge) to Belteshazzar (Prince of Babylon). Hananiah (grace of God) to Shadrach (command of Aku, god of the moon). Mishael (Who is like the Lord?) to Meshach (Guest of the King of Babylon). Azariah (Helped by God) to Abednego (Servant of Nabu, "g"od of Babylon)
- **App:** When God allows your loyalty, fidelity, and identity to be threatened, He's not testing to see if your character is there. He's providing the crucible and environment to bring it out. Nebuchadnezzar chose them because they had a reputation. God chose them because they had character and integrity.

## 2. Conscience

- **Guardrails and Conscience:** (1) Guardrails exist to keep our vehicles from straying into dangerous or off-limit areas. We don't usually pay much attention to them, but we are glad they are there when we need them. (2) Our conscience is our guardrail. It exists to keep us from straying into dangerous and off-limit areas. (3) And when God tests for integrity, he will check to see how well the guardrail of our conscience is constructed.
- **An Informed Conscience (1:8):** <sup>8</sup> *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.*
- **Explanation:** "to be resolved" means "to make up one's mind." He wasn't going to do it period because it violated his informed conscience. Leviticus 11 informed his conscience that what splits the hoof and chews the cud was clean. The king's table wasn't. His conscience informed him that what has fins and scales was clean. The king's table wasn't.
- **A Challenging Conscience (1:9-10):** <sup>9</sup> *Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, <sup>10</sup> but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your 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."*
- **Explanation:** Daniel's decision brought conflict that God had to intervene in: God caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel. If he didn't, death would have been the result because it was an insult to Nebuchadnezzar. And the result of his decision of conscience was ridicule: "why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age?"
- **App:** We like to say, "let our conscience be our guide." But in a Test of Integrity, God wants us to change that statement to this: "let our conscience be our guide when it is informed by Scripture." That's what spiritual integrity is all about. Doing the right thing because it's the right thing before God, regardless of who is or isn't watching.

## 3. Commitment to Commands

- **Surgeon at the Hospital:** (1) Several years ago, I was roaming the halls of the hospital and stumbled upon a local surgeon reading the Bible. (2) Being the preacher I am, I felt inclined to ask him a question: "Does reading the Bible help you before your hand touches the scalpel? He said "no. It helps me while my hand is touching the scalpel." (3) In a time of testing – in the middle of the surgery – Daniel and his friends anchored themselves to the commands of God. And the Divine Surgeon honored them for it.
- **Commands from Long Ago (1:12-13):** <sup>12</sup> *"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> 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."*
- **Explanation:** Daniel does something here you don't expect: he calls for nothing but vegetables. In doing so, he goes all the way back to the time of Adam and Eve, creation himself when God said, "from any tree in the garden you may eat," not to the time of the Kosher Laws of Leviticus. Why? Daniel saw this test God had him in as a battle between the God who spoke the World into existence and the false "g"ods of Babylon who imitate, mock, and try to replicate the Lord's work to no avail.
- **App:** The highest hallmark of integrity is living in and according to the truth in the midst of imitation, mockery, and impostery. And then trusting God to honor that commitment. He does and he did.

## 4. Conduct

- **The Honor System:** (1) In High School, I was used to the rule of not cheating on a test. If we got caught, we got a zero. (2) In College, I got introduced to something I'd never heard of: the Honor System. A system whereby students were trusted to follow rules and act in an honest way. (3) Daniel and His Friends didn't cheat on their exam. And God rewarded them.
- **Honorable Conduct (1:15):** <sup>15</sup> *At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.*
- **Explanation:** They did in private what they told the official they were going to do in public. And they did in private what they vowed before God to do in private. As a result, God rewarded them.
- **Rewarded by the Official (1:16):** <sup>16</sup> *So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.*
- **Rewarded by God (1:17):** <sup>17</sup> *To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.*
- **Rewarded by Nebuchadnezzar (1:20):** <sup>20</sup> *In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.*
- **App:** Integrity is doing the right thing because it's the right thing before God, regardless of who is or isn't watching. In a test of integrity, God isn't testing to see if it's there. He's providing the environment to bring it out. And integrity will always witness to the world. Amen.