

A Sincere Faith

Printed Text · Daniel 1:8-21

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE the choice that Daniel and his friends faced and that choice's outcome; ASPIRE to have the faith of Daniel when confronted with contradictory directives from authorities; and IDENTIFY similar situations that call for the exercise of faith.

In Focus

Michelle had been working at her new company for a little over a month, and she had just been invited by her co-workers out to lunch. While at lunch her co-worker Tamika asked if she was doing anything for the weekend. She had not been out in a while and replied that she did not have plans yet. Tamika asked if she would like to go to a party in what Michelle knew was a neighborhood known for drug dealing.

Tamika said, "Most of us who work here hang out around there together, and it would be cool to have you join us." Two of the other co-workers at the table nodded in agreement. Michelle thought about it for a second. She remembered her cousin almost overdosing at a party in that same neighborhood. She knew that God had not called her to be involved in that kind of environment.

"No, I think I'll pass. I'm not really into the party scene like that. But let me pay for lunch today, I appreciate you all inviting me."

Sometimes God places us in situations where our faith will be tested. Have you ever been tempted to compromise the standards of your faith to be accepted by others?

Keep In Mind

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank" (from Daniel 1:8, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. **Defile** (Daniel 1:8) g a'a l (Heb.) – Topollute, desecrate, stain

B. **Countenance** (vv. 13, 15) m a r'e h (Heb.) – Sight, appearance

Say It Correctly

Hananiah. Hah-nah-NIGH-ah

Mishael. MEE-shah-el

Azariah. as-ur-RYE-uh

KJV

Daniel 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your

meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

NLT

Daniel 1:8 But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods.

9 Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel.

10 But he responded, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded."

11 Daniel spoke with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief of staff to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

12 "Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said.

13 "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's food. Then make your decision in light of what you see."

14 The attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king.

16 So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

17 God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams.

18 When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar.

19 The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the royal service.

20 Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.

21 Daniel remained in the royal service until the first year of the reign of King Cyrus.

The People, Places, and Times

Pulse. In the Hebrew language, this includes everything that is grown from sown seed—not only vegetables, but also fruit, legumes, grains, and bread. It was very similar to a healthy vegetarian diet. This type of food was eaten in a partial fast, excluding meat, dairy, and other delicacies. Eating pulse was not a condemnation of meat eating in general, but regarded by the participant as a way to humble themselves before God.

Eunuch. A eunuch was usually a man who was castrated. These men were guardians of the women of the court, chosen because they could not harm them sexually. Eunuchs were also placed in charge of other court offices because they were single-minded; they were not distracted by sexual desires or family responsibilities. In the ancient world, eunuchs were considered remarkable for their faithfulness to their masters. Eunuchs were common in the royal courts of the Jews, Persians, Babylonians, Romans, and Greeks. In the Law, it was forbidden for eunuchs to be a part of public worship (Deuteronomy 23:1). Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus commends those who have figuratively made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:12).

Why is obedience to God's Word important in developing and strengthening our faith?

Background

The book of Daniel opens with the statement that God delivered His people into captivity. Other prophets issued warnings of this captivity, and Daniel experiences and keeps a journal of this exile firsthand. While captivity is never ideal, God's promise not to leave or forsake His people is evident in these writings. Although Daniel's companions would be memorialized by their Babylonian names (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), Daniel retained his identity and reputation throughout history for the courageous stand he took for God. Mishael, Azariah, and Hananiah were also faithful. They chose to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than bow down to the king's golden idol.

At-A-Glance

1. Purpose Over Pressure (Daniel 1:8–14)
2. Faith Over Fear (vv. 15–16)
3. Testimony After the Test (vv. 17–21)

In Depth

1. Purpose Over Pressure (Daniel 1:8–14)

Daniel maintained an important element of his identity. His purpose in refusing to eat the particular food that the king had provided was much less about ingesting food, and more about maintaining faithfulness to God's Law (Leviticus 17:7–16). While Daniel was in the king's control, he had to obey certain rules, but he still maintained control over his own body.

This type of commitment should also reside within us and resonate with our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. More than a simple protest, Daniel asked permission to follow an alternate diet and also offered a test run so that they could be monitored and protected from others who might be jealous of their special treatment. Often our purposes can be thwarted by pressure from our peers and the powers that be.

Devising a plan of action might be the best tool to employ, considering that temptations and threats will indeed come. Daniel's purpose to obey God was exemplified by his statement of refusal, and his willingness to operate under certain conditions that would satisfy both sides.

When we face temptations to compromise or disobey God, what should we do to resist?

2. Faith Over Fear (vv. 15–16)

Daniel asked to be fed a vegetarian diet in order to avoid eating meat sacrificed to idols and to avoid other trappings of Gentile royalty that might have compromised his dietary restrictions. We may at times be questioned as to why we refrain from certain activities even though they can seem harmless and pose no visible threat.

As Daniel and his companions ate a diet of pulse (vegetables), rather than consume the king's meat and drink, others expected them to wither away. However, as they feasted on vegetables and stood on their faith in God, they were blessed with even healthier appearances than all those in the royal household.

Likewise, our faith should literally show in our lives, because God's presence is impossible to ignore. Their patience and calmness in this high pressured situation helped them operate less out of fear and more through faith in God. They were confident that they would not only survive but thrive in God's care.

How can our faith support us in triumphing over our fears?

3. Testimony After the Test (vv. 17–21)

Despite Daniel's youth and the fact that he was a captive, he honored God in all that he did. Moreover, he did not plot to escape his captivity or otherwise thwart Nebuchadnezzar's schemes. By staying where God had placed him, Daniel and his friends were able to be witnesses of God's power simply by being obedient. Their peaceful resistance to the meal requirement was balanced by their willingness to serve and answer to the king.

Their physical appearance astounded those around them, especially when accompanied by the God-given gifts of discernment and prophecy. Daniel and his friends' testimony was not in their ability to pray for and receive an immediate release from captivity, but rather a demonstration of how God kept them, elevated them and ultimately made them victorious in a treacherous situation. In time, Daniel and his friends would be tested further by the pagan king, but they continued to be faithful to their God.

What are the benefits of choosing to obey God and remain faithful?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Daniel phrase his request to make it seem more favorable to the attendant (Daniel 1:13)?
2. How was God working in the lives of Daniel and his friends while they were in captivity (vv. 9, 17)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we be sure that we are able to defend our faith?
2. What are some of the "Nebuchadnezzars" that we face today?

Liberating Lesson

Those whom society designates as role models are not guaranteed to be examples worth following. Our culture celebrates celebrity for the sake of fame and seems to worship money at any cost,

regardless of the true price in terms of morals and decency. How then can we demonstrate principles and cherish faith in God when the very opposite is what receives all of the attention? The church must be willing to speak the truth, identify both the good and the questionable, and try every spirit against the Spirit of God. A simple act of discernment can prevent disaster and may well save a soul. If you evaluate your personal life, do you demonstrate the characteristics of a positive role model?

Application For Activation

- Write out a list of positive Christian role models who exhibit a life of conviction and character.
- Choose to fast from specific foods this week, e.g., meat or sweets.
- Pray that God would give you convictions that come from Him and not your other authority figures. Write out a list of positive Christian role models who exhibit a life of conviction and character.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Daniel 1:8–21

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

Following the defeat of Judah, Daniel and his friends (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) were among the young men taken into exile in Babylon. Going into captivity meant that the people of Judah would be subjected to the traditions and practices of Babylon, a pagan nation. Daniel 1 records that these young men were given new Babylonian names. Each of their Hebrew names contained a name for the true God ("el," meaning "God," or "iah," an abbreviation for Yahweh). Each Babylonian name contained the name of a pagan deity. The deportation of these young men fulfilled the warning Isaiah had given King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:17–18.

It was forbidden by the Law of Moses for God's people to eat certain foods or participate in pagan rituals and practices. To do so was to be "defiled" (Heb. ga'al, gah-AL), or declared ceremonially unclean for worship. As a captive, Daniel was subject to Babylonian law, but he loved God and decided firmly to remain loyal to worshipping Him. Daniel refused to let anything defile his heart. One way to remain ceremonially pure was to refuse to eat the "king's meat" (Heb. pathbag melek, path-BAG MEH-lek). This meat was probably first offered to idols, and Daniel and his friends were

determined to avoid the sin of idolatry, which was the very reason that Judah was now in captivity. Also, God's Law prohibited the consumption of meat from certain kinds of "unclean" animals (Genesis 9:3-4; Leviticus 7:26-27, 11:3-8, 26-39).

Daniel also refused to drink the king's wine. The word used for "which he drank" in verse 8 and "that they should drink" in verse 16 is *mishteh* (meesh-TEH), a Hebrew term meaning "feast" or "banquet." Its use in this context could be understood to communicate that daily meals in the king's household were feasts, especially when compared to the type and quantity of food and drink most people were able to obtain on a regular basis. Drunkenness has always been regarded as both a moral failure (Deuteronomy 21:20; Ephesians 5:18) and an ill-advised lapse of self-control (Proverbs 20:1, 23:20-21).

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

The word for "favour" (Heb. *chesed*, KHEHsed) means "goodness" or "kindness." It is often translated "loving-kindness" in the Old Testament to describe God's gracious acts to preserve and redeem His people. In a few other places in the Old Testament, *chesed* is used together with *racham* (Heb. RAH-kham, here "tender love") to form an expression that describes God's feelings toward His children (see Psalm 103:4; Hosea 2:19; Jeremiah 16:5).

God gave Daniel such favor with the "prince of the eunuchs." Although we typically think about this story as concerning Daniel's courage to stand up for his convictions, this passage actually points out God's faithfulness. Daniel and his friends were experiencing the consequences of Judah's disobedience. By causing the eunuch to be sympathetic toward Daniel, God was acting in faithfulness to His promise and honoring the prayers of the righteous from ages past.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

The chief eunuch believed that changing the diet of those under his care would be directly disobeying the king's orders. This was no trivial matter because the king had absolute power! During the chief eunuch's service, he had no doubt seen what happened to people who dared to contradict the king.

The verb translated "worse liking" (Heb. *za'af*, zah-AF) literally means "to fret, be sad, or out of humor." The only other place this form occurs in the Old Testament refers to a dejected facial expression (Genesis 40:6). The chief eunuch's concern was that Daniel's health would suffer in comparison to the health of the other young men who would remain on the king's diet.

The phrase "endanger my head" could be translated more literally "make me guilty." The chief eunuch could have been an extremely conscientious man who really didn't want to act on his own initiative without authorization from his superior, or he might simply have been intimidated by the thought of capital punishment. The latter seems most likely, given the conspicuous use of the word "head." In this text, the eunuch believed that giving in to Daniel would be putting his "head" (in English we might say "neck") on the line.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

The chief eunuch did not deny Daniel's request outright but indicated that he was not comfortable with the proposition. Daniel then made his request to the steward assigned to him. Melzar was a

Babylonian title, perhaps meaning “guardian.” Modern English translations interpret the word as a title, not a name. Regardless of whether Melzar was actually his name, he was obviously charged with caring for Daniel and his friends.

Daniel asked Melzar to “prove” (Heb. *nasah*, nah-SAH) or perform a test to see how well Daniel and his comrades would survive on a diet that was more fitting for them. The phrase “I beseech thee” tells us that Daniel had intensified his request. Some English versions use the word “please” to convey the mood of Daniel’s request (NLT). He was appealing to Melzar’s high opinion of him, and he did so in a respectful and courteous manner.

Daniel asked for “pulse” (Heb. *zeroa’*, zay-RO-ah), which means “that which is sown” and refers to vegetables. He wanted a diet of only vegetables. While Daniel’s concern appears religious and not motivated by health purposes, it is still notable to realize that few people—probably only the king and members of the nobility—would have owned enough land to produce meat for consumption on a regular basis. Meat was a luxury. The average person may have eaten meat as little as once or twice per year, and primarily on special religious observances.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king’s meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

Daniel likely asked for the ten-day test as a way to acknowledge the eunuchs’ concerns. By our thinking, ten days on an alternate diet would neither be long enough for their appearance to suffer nor show significant improvement. But Daniel’s faith was in God, and in ten days he knew that God would make the difference and give them favor. If the Lord wanted him to stand for righteousness by abstaining from the king’s food, God would direct the heart of the men who had the power to make it possible for him. Daniel could only have faith to believe that God would reveal Himself in the midst of the test, proving to all that He was God Almighty.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat.

At the end of the test, Daniel and his friends looked better than the children who had eaten from the king’s table. The term “appeared” is a Hebrew word, *ra’ah* (rah-AH), which means to look intently or inspect. The test of ten days ended with a close inspection of the progress made by Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Their countenances were “fairer” (Heb. *tov*, TOVE), a common Old Testament word normally translated “good.” Some English translations render it “better” (ESV, NASB). The word “fatter” (Heb. *bari’*, bah-REE) seems to imply that they had not wasted away, but instead fared well, looking more stout and healthy than their counterparts. In the ancient Near East, girth was a sign of wealth. The common people worked too hard and had too little food available to gain weight. In the ancient world, like underdeveloped regions today, food was scarce and fitness was threatened by malnourishment. If Daniel and the others gained weight, God did it!

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

Up to this point, the text has only indicated that vegetables and water were added to Daniel’s supply of food. No doubt the king’s meat was delivered daily even if it wasn’t eaten. Now Melzar took away the meat and wine. He took action to completely fulfill Daniel’s wish.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and

Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego received both “knowledge” (Heb. madda’, mad-DAH)—also translated “science” (Daniel 1:4) and “thought” (Ecclesiastes 10:20)—and “skill” in abundance. The word here for “skill” (Heb. sakal, sah-KAL) comes from a verb that means “to be prudent.” Other English translations render this word “intelligence” (NASB). Their knowledge and skill came from learning and wisdom. “Learning” (Heb. sefer, SEH-fer) literally means “writing” or “book.”

“Wisdom” (Heb. chokmah, khoak-MAH) is a common word in the Old Testament with a variety of possible connotations, including skill or aptitude, experience, good sense, shrewdness, intellectual capacity, and godly insight. These Hebrew words used for “knowledge,” “skill,” “learning,” “wisdom,” and “understanding” are the exact words used in Daniel 1:3–4 when Nebuchadnezzar outlined his goals for the young captives. God gave Daniel and his friends exactly what the king was looking for when he established their training program. Daniel was also especially blessed with the ability to understand visions and dreams—an indication that God was truly with him and would speak through him (see Numbers 12:6), as he did in several instances recorded in this book (see 2:19, 7:1, 8:1).

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

The eunuchs honored Daniel’s dietary wishes. The moment of truth, however, came when Daniel and his friends were to stand before the king. After three years of first-class education and accommodations (see 1:4), would the Hebrew youth measure up to the king’s expectations? Their future—perhaps even their lives and the lives of the men who cared for and trained Daniel and his friends—were dependent on the outcome.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

The king likely interrogated the young men, either individually or in groups, to discern the depth of their understanding. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah stood head and shoulders above the rest of the captives.

While these four young men distinguished themselves before Nebuchadnezzar, they also distinguished themselves before God through their courage and faithfulness to God’s commands. Many other Jewish youths were enrolled in the same program of education and leadership development. But only these four—certainly a minority—are recorded to have maintained steadfast loyalty to their God.

The phrase “stood before the king” is a literal rendering of the Hebrew. The words are the same ones used in verse 5, which indicates these young men would be working for the king. Some English versions translate the phrase “entered the royal service” (NLT). The conversation with the king was a combination of a final exam and a job interview. We see here a principle of privilege coupled with responsibility. God entrusted Daniel and his friends with great gifts, but those gifts came with an obligation. God called them to stand with courage and conviction repeatedly throughout the time of their service. The king, as the rest of the book shows, was a demanding and unjust man at times. God gives good gifts, but not necessarily to make our lives easier or more comfortable. He frequently calls His most gifted servants to exercise great courage and count any present happiness as loss for the sake of advancing His eternal kingdom.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. 21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

Daniel and his three friends were wiser than all their peers and outdid even the king's diviners. "The magicians and astrologers" refers to those who sought secret knowledge through communication with the spirit world. The diviners believed these spirits to be gods or the spirits of deceased people. It was common in the ancient world for rulers to consult experts in the occult.

The Scriptures do not allow the practice of divination by God's people. Rather, we are to listen to those through whom He has chosen to speak (Deuteronomy 18:10–15). God calls His people to live in faith, trusting that whatever He ordains is right and that He will tell us what we need to know at the right time. The Bible is our guide.

We later learn that Daniel was actually appointed chief of the magicians and wise men because Nebuchadnezzar realized that Daniel was filled with the Spirit of God and that he was actually correct in his interpretations and predictions, unlike the king's magicians (Daniel 2:24, 5:11). Of course, Daniel disavowed the techniques and beliefs of the pagan magicians entirely. He explains that only God can reveal mysteries, and men can only have access to divine knowledge when God chooses to reveal Himself (Daniel 2:27–30).

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego) were "rising stars" in Babylon after their interview with the king. At the time of their exile, no one would have predicted their ascent to the upper echelons of Babylonian government in the next three years. After all, they were basically prisoners of war. But God called them to act courageously, and He honored their faithfulness by using them to leave a powerful and lasting testimony of the one true, living God. By sticking to their convictions, they experienced the power of God in incredible ways.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Psalm 56

Tuesday

1 Kings 18:30-39

Wednesday

Jeremiah 29:4-9

Thursday

Matthew 5:13-16

Friday

Revelation 2:8-11

Saturday

Daniel 1:3-7

Sunday

Daniel 1:8-21