

Daniel's Firm Resolution

Daniel 1:8-21¹

Review: Daniel 1:1-7

- Jehoiakim (the wicked king of the Southern kingdom of Judah) and the city of Jerusalem are besieged in 605 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (the first of three raids on Jerusalem—the other two were in 597 and 586 B.C.).
- Of the captives taken were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were likely in their early to mid-teens. They were to undergo education in Babylonian culture and dialect, as well as partake of the same diet as the king himself partook.
- Daniel wrote this account with several purposes in mind:
 1. To introduce the theme of God's sovereignty over human affairs in the past. (Chapters 7-12 will display God's sovereignty over human affairs in the future)
 2. To set the historical stage for some of the following portions of his book.
 3. To validate his character with regards to his trustworthiness, viz. he loves the Lord and his obedience brought about blessing, therefore you can trust his visions concerning the future.
 4. To show the Jewish people that their exile was determined by God to be judgment for their sin.
 5. To show the Jewish people that God was not done with them yet—they have a future.

642 - 640	Amon (Son)	Evil / Evil		2 Ki 21 2 Ch 33
640 - 608	Josiah (Son)	Good/Good	<i>Habakkuk Zephaniah Jeremiah Ezekiel (Lamentations)</i>	2 Ki 22-23 2 Ch 34-35
608	Jehoahaz (Son)	Evil / Evil		2 Ki 23 2 Ch 36
608 - 597	Jehoiakim (Son of Josiah)	Evil / Evil		2 Ki 23-24 2 Ch 36
597	Jehoiachin (Son)	Evil / Evil		2 Ki 24-25 2 Ch 36
597 - 586	Zedekiah (Son of Josiah)	Evil / Evil		2 Ki 24-25 2 Ch 36
Judah into Babylonian captivity - 586 BC				

Main Truth Statement for Daniel 1:1-21

What is the point of Daniel's account in chapter one? Stephen R. Miller said it well: "Those who are faithful to God will reap divine blessings."² Daniel's life is a shining example of what faithful obedience looks like.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version.

² Borrowed from Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 74.

Outline

1. Daniel's Firm Resolve (1:8)

“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” — Daniel “laid upon his heart” not to defile himself. This is a man who lived by convictions and principles of fidelity to what God said in Holy Scripture.

Of the many things that Nebuchadnezzar did to inundate these young captives with Babylonian culture (e.g. change their names, require them to learn Chaldean dialect, work as officials in the government, etc.), the one thing that Daniel records as “the line in the sand” for him was the king's food. Why was this such a problem for him? There are several possible reasons:

- The food may have been forbidden food in the Law. The Babylonians were known to eat forbidden foods such as pork and horseflesh. The Lord laid out in the Mosaic Law what was permissible and not permissible to eat (Lev. 11; Deut. 14).
- The food may have been offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor. 8–10).
- The blood may not have been drained out of the meat before being prepared (cf. Lev. 17:13–14).³
- Partaking of the king's food may have been a source of moral defilement.

“All food in Babylon or Assyria was ritually unclean (Ezek. 4:13; Hos. 9:3, 4) and from that there was no escape. The book itself provides the needed clue in 11:26, where the rare word *pat bag* recurs: ‘Even those who eat his *rich food* shall be his undoing.’ By eastern standards to share a meal was to commit oneself to friendship: it was of covenant significance (Gen. 31:54; Exod. 24:11; Neh. 8:9–12; cf. Matt. 26:26–28). Those who had thus committed themselves to allegiance accepted an obligation of loyalty to the king. It would seem that Daniel rejected this symbol of dependence on the king because he wished to be free to fulfil his primary obligations to the God he served. The defilement he feared was not so much a ritual as a moral defilement, arising from the subtle flattery of gifts and favours which entailed hidden implications of loyal support, however dubious the king's future policies might prove to be.”⁴

In any case, Daniel and his friends knew that the disobey the Lord would lead to their defilement before Him. They longed to obey the One who had been rebelled against for so long. Their obedience to God was more important than the commands of their captors (cf. Acts. 5:29). To rebel against the ruthless reign of a man like Nebuchadnezzar would most certainly mean death. Yet to Daniel fidelity to God along with the experience of joy in obedience was well worth the pain of man's displeasure. Along with the threat of death, Daniel and his three comrades may have jeopardized their chance for advancement as well as suffered the pressure to cave in along with their peers. Those who stand alone firm in their convictions will inevitably stand out amongst their peers. As Daniel will ultimately illustrate, the Lord will bless those who are faithful to Him (sometimes in this life and most certainly in the next!).

“therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” — Instead of obstinately demanding his way, Daniel politely/courteously requested that he might be exempt from the food that the king required him to eat. Here the fruit of the Spirit *gentleness* is displayed (Gal. 5:22–23).

³ Miller, *Daniel*, 66.

⁴ Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 92.

2. God's Faithful Blessing (1:9–21)

a. *The Diet Test* (vv. 9–16)

Once again we see how God has been working throughout all of this account: it is God (*Elohim*) who has been orchestrating all of the events recorded in chapter one. God had granted Daniel favor in the eyes of the commander of the officials. Daniel seems to make it painstakingly clear that nothing in this story is a result of his own cunning and devising.

The potential problem that arises is that though Daniel does not fear for his head in disobeying the king, the commander of the officials most certainly does! He does not want to “forfeit his head” (NASB) on account of a few captive’s supposed whims. Yet Daniel gently offers a suggestion: “*Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 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.*” The word *vegetables* (“pulse” KJV) refers to something that was planted in the ground. This would include vegetables, wheat, beans, etc. In essence, Daniel wanted to separate himself distinctly from the rest of the captives who were eating the same meals that the king ate. The test was to last only ten days. The results would have to be dramatic for it to be noticeable in that short of time. Yet Daniel seems to be completely unconcerned with the outcome. He trusts that whatever will happen will be exactly as God intended.

At the end of the ten days the Lord clearly worked a miracle. The four young Jewish captives were “fatter in flesh” than all of the other people eating the king’s diet. This does not mean that they were “fatter” in the sense of “obese.” Rather, they were healthy and well nourished. The Lord had indeed blessed Daniel for his faithful response.

b. *The Youth’s Skills* (v. 17)

The Lord continued to bless these young men with skills that excelled beyond that of their peers.

“The unseen hand of God directs the whole course of events (verses 2, 9) and gives not only physical health but also intellectual vigour to his faithful servants. Daniel’s particular gift of understanding visions and dreams was appropriate to his need in a land where such was expected of wise men, and the God who was the source of all knowledge would also give discernment to distinguish the true from the false. Thus there was no need to fear that study of Babylonian or any other culture would result in conversion to an alien religion.”⁵

The fact that “God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every *branch* of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all *kinds* of visions and dreams” (NASB) displays that there is indeed blessing for those who faithfully obey the Lord. The final phrase concerning Daniel reminds the Jewish readers that the visions he records in chapters 7–12 are not arbitrary; they are intentional.

c. *The Final Review* (vv. 18–20)

After the education period ended, Nebuchadnezzar tested/interviewed each of the captives to determine their suitability to serve in his kingdom. Of all the captives taken, none exceeded the skill, wisdom, and knowledge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In fact, he found them “ten times” (literally “ten hands”) better than all the others (corresponding to the ten days of testing they went through). Baldwin notes that “*Magicians* (Heb. *ḥarṭummîm*) is used of the

⁵ Baldwin, *Daniel*, 93.

soothsayer priests of Egypt (e.g. Gen. 41:8; Exod. 7:11) and the word may be derived from an Egyptian original. *Enchanters* occurs only in Daniel; it comes from an Akkadian root and passed into Syriac, where it means 'snake charmer'.⁶

d. *The Divine Security (v. 21)*

Daniel makes one final note about his long stay in captivity (from 605–539 B.C.). We know that Daniel lived in captivity even beyond that point (Dan. 10:1). This little statement shows you how much the Lord loved (Dan. 10:11) and watched over the life of Daniel.

Lessons from Daniel 1:8–21

1. Purpose in your heart to be faithfully obedient to God's Word.
2. Purpose in your heart to be persistently separate from what defiles.
3. Purpose in your heart to be submissively accepting of the results.
4. Purpose in your heart to be keenly aware of God's sovereign control.
5. Purpose in your heart to be adequately prepared to serve the Lord.

⁶ Ibid.