

Daniel 1:8-21

Last week we noted how the Babylonians had wanted to enculturate the new Jewish captives and train some of those from the royal family and nobility for service in the Babylonian Government. This process involved four things:

- a. Learning the language and literature of the Babylonians.
- b. Eating Babylonian food and drinking Babylonian wine.
- c. An immersive three-year educational process.
- d. Renaming them with Babylonian names.

In summary, the Babylonians wanted to erase any former connection to the captive's prior Jewish life. They were trying to change their cultural identity. This is what Satan wants to do with us: immerse us in the world's culture: its language, literature, education, values, and then redefine you, all in an effort to erase or minimize your Christian identity. In today's passage we will see how Daniel and his friends resisted this enculturation effort and how God honored their choices.

We can divide the remainder of the chapter as follows:

- a. Daniel's Testing, vs 8-16.
 1. Daniel's request of Ashpenaz, vs 8-10.
 2. The request of the Steward, vs 11-16.
- b. Daniel's Blessing, vs 17-21.

Daniel's Testing, vs 8-16.

Daniel's request of Ashpenaz, vs 8-10.

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 compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your^[c] 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."

Vs 8a: But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine,

This verse is one of the most important in all scripture with regards to personal holiness, sanctification, and dedication. Daniel immediately realized what was going on and saw that eating the King's food and drinking his wine would violate the Mosaic law. What made food kosher (according to the law) was both its origin and preparation. The word *royal food* is a Persian loan word used only here and in 11:26. It means a delicacy or rich food, and was food eaten by the king himself. This food may have contained items the law forbade such as pork or

horse, and Daniel had no control over how it was prepared (for the law proscribed certain regulations for preparation—see Lev 7:22-27, 17:10-13). Additionally, though the Law did not forbid wine, it did forbid drinking or eating items dedicated to idol worship. But most importantly, eating and drinking the King's food and wine means accepting his friendship and patronage. To share food and wine is to commit one to a relationship. It binds you. This idea was common in the ancient world (see Gen 31:54, Ex 24:11, Neh 8:9-12), and it is common today. When you share food and wine you are building and sharing relationship. 2 K 25:29, tells us Jehoiachin ate at Nebuchadnezzar's table implying his loyalty to Babylon. Dan 11:26 warns against anyone to eat *rich food* (the same word here) from the king who is to come for eating creates relationship.

Daniel does not refuse the Babylonian education, the language training, or the renaming, for learning these things does not change his own core beliefs, but he draws the line at the dietary command for eating the King's food as it is a public declaration of his dependence on the King, and Daniel resolves to be dependent on the Lord. Therefore, Daniel resolves not to eat the King's food. The word *resolve* is to set his heart, determine, be fixed.

Vs 8b: and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

So, now Daniel goes to Ashpenaz to ask for an exemption. It is interesting that Daniel could approach Ashpenaz as Daniel was a captive slave, but we see in verse 9, God had given Daniel favor in Ashpenaz's eyes.

Vs 9, Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel,

Here we see the hidden sovereignty and grace of God. God had caused the official to see Daniel in a favorable light. This is a very comforting and fascinating verse for it shows that God goes before us. He changes the hearts and minds of pagan people for his purposes.

Vs 10, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your^[c] 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."

Ashpenaz, though favorably disposed towards Daniel, is afraid for his life for if Daniel does not eat the king's food and looks the worse for it, the king will have Ashpenaz's head. The king is obviously vested in this enterprise and Ashpenaz knows the king is watching. Ashpenaz is like any good bureaucrat. He will protect his position and ensure that he follows the rules. He does not want to risk an alternative way of doing something.

The request of the Steward, vs 11-16.

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.

Vs 11, Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,

Daniel is not deterred by Ashpenaz’s refusal. It is apparent that Daniel and his friends have a steward that is personally responsible for them. While Ashpenaz is responsible for training the whole crew and is directly accountable to Nebuchadnezzar, he has stewards responsible for smaller groups of captives. These stewards report to Ashpenaz. In verses 11 and 12, Daniel approaches the supervisor responsible for him and his friends and proposes a plan.

Vs 12, “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.

The plan is to let Daniel and his friends eat only vegetables and drink only water and see what they look like in 10 days. The word vegetable is translated as “pulse” in the KJV which means grain or vegetable. The word in Hebrew means “something sown” and can mean either vegetable or grain. The 10-day period seems short but is probably the limit Daniel felt the steward was comfortable with.

Vs 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.

Daniel asked his immediate steward to compare his and his friend’s appearance with that of the other captives and treat them according to what the steward saw. Here we see the supernatural intervention of God as 10 days is not enough time to see a difference between the two diets. In other words, if we did a double-blind study and took half of this congregation and placed you on a vegetarian diet and the rest of us ate what we regularly ate and compared our appearance in 10 days I doubt there would be any of us that could tell a difference by appearance. Yet, in Daniel’s case, God gave Daniel and his friends a “healthy appearance.”

Vs 14, So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

Like Ashpenaz, God goes before Daniel and favorably opens this man's heart to Daniel's words and plan. We should take great comfort and courage in this. As Daniel purposed in his heart to honor and serve God, God made it possible for him to do so. The steward had no reason to allow this plan. Why would he risk it? Yet he does and grants Daniel and his friends the opportunity to try it.

Vs 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.

In verse 15 we have the result of the ten-day test. The four young men looked *healthier and better nourished* than the rest. The word *healthier* means appearance or visage. The word *better nourished* can be translated fatter. In ten days, the young men looked better and fatter than the rest. When one is sick you can see they do not feel good. Their appearance has changed, and when they feel better you can see they look better. Here we have a similar phenomenon: the young men looked better than the others—enough so that it convinced the steward that Daniel's plan had worked.

Vs 16, So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

The guard (steward) took away the king's food and committed himself to Daniel's plan. We never learn whether Ashpenaz heard of or knew of his steward's actions.

Daniel's Blessing, vs 17-21.

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. ¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Vs 17, 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.

This is an amazing verse for it shows God enables learning and understanding. Prov 1:7 says, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*. Daniel says in chapter 2, *God gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning*. 2 K 3:12 says that God gave Solomon *a wise and discerning*

heart. God can and does enable us to learn and understand, and in Dan 1 we see he gives the four young men *knowledge and understanding* and to Daniel a special ability to understand *visions and dreams*. Knowledge is content. It is facts, figures, information, and concepts. Understanding and wisdom are how to apply knowledge to real world situations. They have the idea of discernment. Visions are prophetic revelations one “sees” in the day, while dreams are prophetic revelations that occur while sleeping at night. In addition to knowledge and wisdom, Daniel was given this special gift to interpret visions and dreams, and this gift sets up the rest of the book for Daniel is the vessel God uses to prophetically explain the times of the Gentiles.

Vs 18-19. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.

After three years the selected captives are brought before the King for a personal interview, and the four young men nailed it. Neb then employed them into his service. We can presume this was in some administrative function in relation to the rest of the exiles.

Vs 20, 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.

Verse 20 gives us further insight into the interview. Neb found the four young Hebrew men ten times better than his own magicians and enchanters. So not only were the four men better than the rest of the Hebrew trainees, but they were also better than his own officials. The word *magician* is the Hebrew word *hartom* and means diviner, magician, or astrologer. It also has the idea of an engraver or writer. Putting these two together implies the magicians read the stars, tried to discern and interpret the times, and wrote it all down. They were the possessors of occult knowledge. It is much like the political and geo-political commentators of today. They view the world and all its data points and try to interpret the times and foretell what is to come. The word *enchanter* is the Hebrew word *ashshaph* has a more spiritual reference. It is a conjurer or necromancer. One who attempted to communicate with the dead to discern future events. We are not given how Neb discerned that Daniel and his friends were ten times better at discerning events than his own people, but we will see in Chapter two how this God given ability propels Daniel to the highest level of government. It is interesting that these magicians and enchanters were the ancestors of the Magi found in Matthew chapter one and it is obvious from the next few chapters how much influence Daniel will have over these men. No doubt he shared the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah with them so that almost 600 years later, their descendants, the Magi, would seek the true King of Kings when His star appeared in the Eastern sky.

Vs 21, And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

We conclude the chapter with a comment on Daniel's length of service. King Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC. The first year of his reign would be considered 538 since the Babylonian's counted his reign from the first full year of his ascension to power.

Two last thoughts on this chapter. The first is there is always a believing remnant among the Nation of Israel. Though Judah had now been overrun (605BC) and will be finally destroyed in just a few years (586BC), God always preserves a faithful remnant of believers and preserves them. The second thought is just because he preserves them does not mean they are exempted from the divine discipline the nation experienced. Daniel and his friends suffered the consequences of Judah's disobedience, though God preserved and watched over them during their exile.