

Integrity Established
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Daniel 1:1-20

Opening: I haven't quoted a country song lately, here's an old one: "Stop The World And Let Me Off!" Ever feel that way? As followers of Christ we can really relate to that sentiment as we view the ungodly world around us. The reality of an amusement park ride is once the ride starts you can't get off. Sometimes we forget, we're not on this "ride" by accident. Our Heavenly Father PLACED us exactly where we are in this pagan world for His purposes.

I can imagine Daniel might have felt like saying "Stop The World and Let Me Off" when he and his fellow Hebrews were sent into captivity in Babylon for seventy years. God orchestrated this as punishment for the sins of the nation Israel. In Jeremiah 29 God told these captives, build houses, plant gardens, have kids, you're going to be in Babylon for a while. The "ride" has started and you're on it!

In chapter one of Daniel's "journal" we see themes that run through the whole book:

- God's sovereign control and deliverance for His people
- Our need to trust and obey God alone and not compromise
- Our need to persevere (Daniel served in Babylon 70 years without compromise)
- God's faithfulness to Daniel (as He is to us)

In this first chapter of Daniel I believe we will see another important lesson that we can apply to our lives today. If I gave this lesson a new title it might be this: "How to be a Light in the World Without Being a "Blowtorch!" - Living and working successfully in an ungodly world without compromising our godly values.

Let's read these first few verses, then I want us to look at some key points.

Daniel 1:1–21 (NLT) — 1 During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. **2** The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god. **3** Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. **4** "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon." **5** The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his

own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service. **6** Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. **7** The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego. **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.

- Daniel served in Babylon into his 80's. Here he was likely 14-16 years old.
- Daniel and his friends were likely from Hebrew nobility and the king chose them because they were exceptional. They were "strong, healthy, good-looking young men." Smart but not nerdy, attractive but not foolish, these were teens with huge potential for this three year "brainwashing" plan to make them more "Babylonian" so they could serve directly under the king.
- They were given new pagan names and a new diet.
- The food and drink was the best! It was what the king ate and drank.
- Before you think this is a "proof text" for being vegan, it's not about the food. The food simply represented compromise to these devout Hebrews.
- "Unclean" non-Kosher food or food that had been offered to idols represented disobedience to God for them. This was personal conviction.
- Verse eight: Daniel "purposed" or "determined" not to defile himself.
- He had determined his convictions before the temptation arose.
- Daniel "requested" or "asked for permission" not to eat the unacceptable food. What is significant about Daniel's approach and attitude?
- He didn't throw a fit or throw his plate. There was no hunger strike. Daniel was courageous but not outrageous, resolved but respectful.
- Verse nine: God gave this official "respect" and "affection" for Daniel.
- What is the lesson for us in how to conduct ourselves with pagans?
- Daniel acted wisely and God took care of the situation.
- **Proverbs 16:7 (ESV) — 7** When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

- Though sympathetic, the official knew his very life was on the line if these boys' physical condition suffered because they weren't on the king's diet.
- So Daniel got creative and proposed a ten-day experiment. Give us water and vegetables and test us at the end. What creativity and faith for a teen!
- We just read how the story ended. They looked "healthier" than the rest.
- In verse seventeen we again see God's hand at work in their situation.

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.

- What is implied about how they conducted themselves in training?
- How was their behavior NOT what you would expect from captives?
- "God gave [them] unusual aptitude." "God gave Daniel ability to interpret dreams." They were "ten times" more capable than the king's magicians!
- They did their best and God supernaturally did what only He can do.
- They "entered the royal service" as trusted advisers to a pagan king.
- Shouldn't we take exception that they went to work for this pagan king?
- Shouldn't they have put up a fight? Shouldn't they have refused to participate in this training/brainwashing? Were these kids just deceived by these clever pagans at the "University of Nebuchadnezzar?" If so, why did God bless them and position them to literally join the administration?
- They assimilated but they never disobeyed God. Soon we'll get to the fiery furnace and the lion's den over these weeks of study. Those accounts prove again that these young men were not "compromisers." They didn't pick those fights; they were the victims of evil, jealous Babylonians.
- Clearly God moved on their hearts to "cooperate without compromise."
- How can we apply this in our lives this coming week and every week?
- I think this passage proves you can take a stand without picking a fight.
- Warren Wiersbe writes: *"Throughout Scripture you will find courageous people who had to defy authority in order to obey God, and in every case, they took the wise and gentle approach. 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone' (Rom. 12:18 NIV)."*
- Speaking of the workplace, Chuck Swindoll said, *"Don't put your superior on the spot because of your faith... Don't feel you must right every wrong in your company because you have convictions against those wrongs."*ⁱⁱ
- *"Wait a minute; we're supposed to push back against this evil world."*
- *"What about Paul and Silas in prison?"* They didn't try to overthrow the government, they simply preached the gospel and wouldn't stop.

- “Well, Jesus called people out with strong language.”
- Yes, He called out the religious hypocrites with strong language.
- He told pagans about their sin with firmness but gentleness.
- Daniel’s example proves we can cooperate without compromise.
- We can live successfully in a pagan world without disobeying God.
- We can be a light without being a “blow torch!”
- Here’s an example: Chick-Fil-A doesn’t open on Sunday but you don’t see a neon sign that says “*We keep the Sabbath holy?*”
- What was Truett Cathy’s explanation? “*Having worked seven days a week in restaurants open 24 hours, Truett saw the importance of closing on Sundays so that he and his employees could set aside one day to rest and worship if they choose — a practice we uphold today.*”ⁱⁱⁱ
- Is it a sin to open a restaurant on Sunday? If so, we’re all about to participate in that sin when we leave church today! The Cathy family is simply operating based on their own personal convictions.
- They are being a light without being a blowtorch.
- Some Christians seem to be more “heat than light.”
- Jesus commanded: — **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. **Matthew 5:16 (ESV)**
- Our mission is about winning people to Christ, not winning an argument.
- “*But Jesus came not to bring peace but a sword! Shouldn’t we fight?*”
- He said HE brought a sword, not us. He told us to love our enemies.
- Jesus didn’t command us to make a fuss; He called us to make disciples.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Daniel’s example is a very practical lesson for all of us who live in this pagan world. He was...
 - Courageous but not outrageous
 - Resolved but respectful
 - Purposeful but practical
 - Creative in his approach but trusting God for divine protection
 - Outstanding without being an oddball
 - Cooperative without compromise
- We too can be a light without being a “blowtorch” if we will be wise.
- Like Daniel, we can take a stand without picking a fight. We can live and work successfully in an ungodly world without compromising our godly values.

ⁱ Jeremiah 29:4-7

ⁱⁱ <https://www.insightforliving.ca/broadcast/daniel/DL1D02>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.chick-fil-a.com/about/who-we-are>