

IN EXILE

"BETWEEN TWO WORLDS"

DANIEL 1:1-21

This Week's Core Competency

Single-mindedness – I focus on God and His priorities for my life. Matthew 6:33 *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Tragedy has a way of getting and focusing our attention. The destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the looting of the temple was a tragedy that got the attention of the exiles and focused it on careful obedience to the law—single-minded obedience to the law if you will. God had warned Israel that obedience to the Mosaic covenant would bring blessing and disobedience would bring cursing. In Deuteronomy 28, the LORD promises blessing for obedience. He says: "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God" (vv.1-2). What follows is a list of particular blessings that begins, "You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country," which refers to being blessed everywhere.

The LORD also warns of curses for disobedience. He says: "However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you (v. 15). What follows is a list of particular curses that begins: "You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country," which refers to being cursed everywhere—the ultimate curse

Tragedy has a way of getting and focusing our attention.

— see Daniel 1:8

being removal from the land (v. 63; cf., 2Ki 25:21).

There was no doubt in the Chronicler's mind that the destruction of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem were brought on by the disobedience. He writes: "The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and spared neither young man nor young woman, old man or aged. God handed all of them over to Nebuchadnezzar. He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. "He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah" (2Ch 36:15-21).

When my son was young, I warned him repeatedly about climbing a pine tree in our front yard. One day he fell from the tree, and I found him sitting cross-legged on the grass. When I looked at his face, I saw he had a deep open cut from the middle of his forehead that ran along his hairline to just above one ear. I rushed him to the emergency room, and once I learned to my relief that he wasn't going to die, I found myself with him in the examining room waiting
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for a doctor. He broke the silence by saying, "Dad come here; I want to tell you something."

By that time I was angry that he hadn't listened to my repeated warnings about climbing that darn tree, so I told him, "I don't need to come there; tell me what you want to tell me."

After a couple of rounds of this, I walked over to him and leaned down to hear what he had to say. He said, "Dad, I bet I never do that again." And he didn't. He never climbed that tree again.

Once they found themselves in Babylon, the exiles determined to "never do that again," i.e., never treat the law with the same disregard as they had in the past.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Daniel 1:1-21

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 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.

3 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—4 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. 5 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.

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 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 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."

11 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.

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.

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 enchanterers in his whole kingdom.

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

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "third year" in v. 1 and "first year" in v. 21.
- * Circle "delivered" in v. 2.
- * Circle "his god" in v. 2.
- * Bracket "food and wine" v. 5.
- * Circle "new names" in v. 7.
- * Box "but" indicating contrast in v. 8.

- * Circle "defile" in v. 8.
- * Bracket "God had caused" in v. 9.
- * Circle "test" in v. 12.
- * Circle "their" and "them" in v. 16.
- * Highlight v. 17.
- * Bracket "ten times better" v. 20.

day **2**

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Where were Daniel and his friends (*physical setting*) and when were they there (*temporal setting*)?
2. Describe the *cultural setting* (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, customs) in terms of whether it was *positive* or *negative*.
3. What do you infer from the fact that Ashpenaz renamed Daniel and his companions?
4. Explain the *contrast* in verse 8 and describe its importance in the opening episode in the story.
5. Why did Daniel refuse the king's food and wine?
6. Daniel displayed *wisdom* in dealing with the dilemma he faced. How so?
7. Assess the role the unnamed guard played in the episode.
8. What makes verse 17 the most important verse in chapter 1?
9. **Discussion:** Talk about what readers are to infer from the conclusion of the episode?

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The story that ended *in the land* with the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the looting of the temple (2Ki 24-25; 2Ch 36:5-23) is subsequently picked up *in Babylon* with the story of the exiles introduced in chapter 1 of the book of Daniel. The first chapter does what readers expect of any good introduction to a story. It describes the setting, both geographical and chronological. Sometime after the defeat of Jehoiakim and the looting of the temple, the exiles find themselves in Babylon attending the Royal Academy in preparation for entrance into the king's service. It introduces the major characters. Daniel, the hero, and his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, heroes in their own right, belong to a larger number of bright young men of royal and noble birth with both the physique and the acumen to enter the king's service once they complete their training. After three years, Nebuchadnezzar determines who graduates. In the end, Daniel is the one who stands head and shoulders above all his classmates, as well as "all the magicians and enchanters in the whole kingdom" (v. 22). And finally, it launches the plot-action to follow, which in this case is different. One author writes: "The first six chapters of the Book of Daniel do not present a single sustained action. Each episode is self-contained, and Daniel himself does not even participate in two of the episodes. As we read these chapters, we participate in six separate ordeals spanning many years. The ordeals are, in order, the testing of the four Hebrew youths, Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the ordeal in the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar's fall and restoration, Belshazzar's feast, and Daniel in the lion's den. The governing principle is to hold up models of heroism for our contemplation" (Leland Ryken, *Words of Delight*, 109-10). The tension common to all of the episodes is the tension that comes with living in a pagan society hostile to biblical faith.

Structurally, the first chapter is a chiasm, the first 14 verses describe a dilemma, and the last 7 its resolution:

- A' Babylon is supreme over Israel vv. 1-2
- B' Young men are selected to prepare for the king's service vv. 3-7
- C' Daniel seeks to remain undefiled v. 8-14
- C' Daniel successfully remains undefiled vv. 15-16
- B' Young men excel in their preparation for the king's service vv. 17-20
- A' Daniel proves supreme over the Babylonians v. 21

According to verses 1-2, the year is 605 B.C. and Nebuchadnezzar has entered Jerusalem, looted the temple, and returned to Babylon with an unspecified number of captives. The setting-temporal, physical, and cultural-sets the stage for various, primarily religious, clashes to follow. The fact that Babylon's king has subjected Judah's king, Jehoiakim, and Babylon's god has subjected Judah's God, Yahweh, makes it the worst of times.

According to verses 3-7, Babylon's sovereign orders Ashpenaz, his chief court official, to select the best and the brightest from among the captives to study at the Royal Academy. He intends to teach them Babylonian language and literature in order to prepare them to enter his service, as well as to transform them into Babylonians, indistinguishable from others in his administration. He gives them a full scholarship, including room and board, and assigns them daily rations of food and wine, the very same food and wine that he, himself, is served each day. And to complement their education, he purposefully changes their Hebrew names. He gives them "new names" in an effort to change their religious identity, which would complete their personal transformation. "Somewhat like Alexander the Great at a later time, Nebuchadnezzar adopted an enlightened policy of enlisting the most promising young men of his new empire into government service, whatever their nationality . . . Nebuchadnezzar resolved to pool the best brains and abilities discoverable in the ranks of the nations he had conquered" (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 7:33).

According to verses 8-14 Daniel successfully devises a way to avoid defiling himself with the king's rations. "But," that is in contrast to what the king decides, Daniel, and presumably his three friends, decide otherwise; they decide to refuse the royal food and wine, opting instead for a vegetarian diet. The reason behind their refusal is twofold. "First the food would likely include at times meat declared unclean by the law of Moses; and, second, that it would regularly be food first offered to the Babylonian gods" (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 37). Disobedience to the law results in discipline (Dt 28); the exiles know that for certain (Jer 11). After all, they are living in captivity because of Judah's disobedience, which means they are not about to take the law lightly any longer. Moreover, God is at work behind the scenes, as he had been in Joseph's life, to ensure Daniel's success, initially by causing Ashpenaz to show him favor and sympathy.

But while this official might want to grant Daniel's request, he fears what will happen if Daniel fares worse than the others he supervises. No one dare cross or disappoint the king. Dereliction of duty is a capital offense.

At this point in the story an unnamed guard enters the picture. He's heroic in that he agrees to test Daniel and his friends. He agrees to feed the four of them vegetables and give them only water to drink with a view to assessing their condition in ten days. If the guard acts with the chief official's authority, the text makes no mention of it. If he doesn't his daring runs the risk of costing him dearly. Herein is another example of God at work behind the scenes.

According to verses 15-16, Daniel and his companions pass the test. Lo and behold, at the end of the ten days they turn out to be better nourished than any of their peers, who ate the king's food and drank his fine wine. The guard immediately recognizes the difference and takes the others' choice food and wine away and gives them vegetables and water instead.

According to verses 17-20, all of the young men excel, but Nebuchadnezzar finds none equal to Daniel and his companions. The use of the pronouns is a little confusing in this section. At the end of ten days, the four men who are tested

appear healthier and better nourished than their peers, but "At the end of the time set by the king," i.e., three years (v. 5), all of the young men are presented to the king ("them" in v. 18). Four among them stand out but not because of diet alone; diet alone, as it were, isn't determinative. Herein lies the importance of verse 17. The superiority of Daniel and his friends isn't due to diet; it's due to God. "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and reams of all kinds." One commentator puts it this way: "God gave Daniel and his three friends the ability to master the subjects they studied and wisdom in these matters (cf. James 1:5). They may have thought that Nebuchadnezzar had designed their curriculum, but really God had. Like Moses and Paul, Daniel had an excellent educational background and an unusually brilliant mind (cf. Acts 7:22; Phil. 3:4). God also gave Daniel the supernatural ability to understand visions and dreams (v. 17)" (Constable, 23).

Finally, according to verse 21, Daniel is the one who remains in the kingdom through the regime change. Cyrus, the Persian, comes to power in 539 B.C., and Daniel is still living in 537 to see the exiles return to Judah from Babylonian captivity some seven decades later.

The Message of the Passage

Use godly wisdom to maintain your spiritual integrity in a culture unsympathetic, even hostile, to your Christian way of life.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **third year** Cf., Jer 46:2. The problem regarding the exact year of Jehoiakim's rule, i.e., whether the third (Da 1:1) or the fourth (Jer 46:2), has more than one possible solution. With regard to the start of the year: "Nisan reckoning began the new year on the first day of the spring month, Nisan (April), and Tishri the first of the fall month, Tishri (October). Any event falling in the six-month period between these two months would carry different year-dates, according to which term of reckoning was employed. Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem came during that period, the summer of 605 B.C." (Wood, 28). Or with regard to the start of a king's reign: "According to the Babylonian system of computing the years of a king's reign, the third year of Jehoiakim would have been 605 B.C., since his first full year of kingship began on New Year's Day after his accession in 608. But according to the Judahite system, which counted the year of accession as the first year of reign, this was the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer 25:1; 46:2)" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Da 1:1).

v. 1 **delivered** Cf., 2Ch 36:15-21. "Judah was exiled to Babylonia because she disobeyed God's word regarding covenant-keeping, the Sabbath years and idolatry (see Lev 25:1-7; 26:27-35; 2Ch 36:14-21). The first deportation (605 B.C.) included Daniel, and the second (597) included Ezekiel. A third deportation took place in 586, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Da 1:2).

v. 2 **his god** "Babylon was the main city and capital of Babylonia. It was situated on the Euphrates River, some fifty miles south of modern Baghdad. Within the city were more than fifty temples to various deities, but the main one was to Marduk, located in what was called the sacred area. In this area, entered by the magnificent Ishtar gate, was also a great ziggurat, a sacred tower crowned with a small shrine. The splendid Marduk temple boasted numerous chapels to deities other than Marduk, but his was the principal one, richly decorated with cedar-wood paneling, gold, alabaster, and semi-precious stones. This temple was likely the one to which Nebuchadnezzar brought Judah's sacred vessels" (Wood, 31).

v. 5 **food and wine** "The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank" (ESV). Cf., "from the king's table" (v. 5), i.e., fit for the king. "*The king's own food*. The word for 'own food' (pat-bag) is Old Persian (patibaga), and means 'portion' or 'assignment.' The phrase translates literally: 'from the portion of the king,' meaning 'from the very food which the king ate' . . . *And wine*. Literally, 'and wine from his drinking,' meaning 'and the wine which the king himself drank.' Both food and wine, then, were to be the same as set before Nebuchadnezzar himself" (34)

v. 7 **new names** "Daniel's name probably means 'My Judge is God.' 'Hananiah' means 'Yahweh Has Shown Grace,' 'Mishael' means 'Who is What God Is?' and 'Azariah' means 'Yahweh Has Helped.' The new names assigned them all included or referred to various Babylonian gods: Bel, Aku, and Nego (a possible variant of Nebo). 'Belteshazzar' may mean 'Bel's Prince,' or possibly 'Lady Protect the King,' referring to the goddess Sarpanitu, the wife of Marduk. 'Shadrach' may mean 'Command of Aku,' or 'I Am of Little Account.' And 'Abednego' most likely means 'Servant of [the god] Nebo'" (Constable, 20-21).

v. 8 **defile** "Only these four [Daniel and his companions], however, had the courage to observe the dietary laws of the Torah (cf. Lev 11; Deut 14), which forbade Jews to eat unclean foods. Probably most of the meat items on the menu were taken from animals sacrificed to the patron gods of Babylon (Marduk, Nebo, and Ishtar, for example) and no doubt the wine from the king's table (v. 5) had first been part of the libation to these deities. Therefore even those portions of food and drink *not inherently unclean* had been tainted by contact with pagan cultic usage" (Archer, 34-35, italics added).

v. 9 **God had caused** The careers of Daniel and Joseph are similar in this regard: God caused both to prosper (cf., Ge 39:2-3, 21-23; 41:39-40; 45:5-8), and God gave both wisdom (Ge 41:33-41, 46-57) as well as the ability to interpret dreams (Ge 40:8; 41:9-16, 25, 39).

v. 12 **test** "Notice that Daniel did not rebel against the restrictions that his elders placed upon him. Instead he courteously requested permission to abstain [v. 8], and then, having received an encouraging response, he offered a positive alternative course of action [v. 12]" (Constable, 22).

v. 17 **God gave** Daniel is distinguished in that, in addition to "knowledge and understanding . . . and learning" God gave him the ability to "understand visions and reams of all kinds." "The statement concerning Dan. is somewhat in the nature of an introductory remark, to prepare the reader for his interpretation of Neb.'s dream in ch. 2 . . . the present vs. has reference to the ability of interpreting the dreams and visions of others, and thus it serves as a preparation for the events recorded in ch. 2" (Edward J. young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, 49).

v. 20 **ten times better** "'Ten times' is an idiom meaning 'many times' (cf. Gen. 31:7, 41; Num. 14:22; Job 19:3)" (J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1332).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

I'd like to meet Daniel's parents. I am guessing they played a huge part in the devotion to God that Daniel demonstrated in the first chapter of Daniel. He was likely a teenager at the time when King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. He instructed his chief of court officials to find young, smart, healthy men to become a part of his service. The fact that Daniel was chosen is not surprising as we learn of his first request to the king's official. The LORD's hand was obviously on Daniel; however, I would bet his parents had a significant impact on his faith development from an early age. How can we raise young men and woman who are resolved to follow the Lord? There are many ways including these: (1) Pray. Raising kids is hard work and can be stressful! Philippians 4:6 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (2) Teach them God's Word. Let God's Word be the final authority in your home. Open and read it often. 2 Timothy 3:15 - And how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. (3) Lovingly discipline. Proverbs 3:12 - Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. Enjoy your soon-to-be-teen this week!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Daniel 1

1. What happened to the people of Jerusalem?
2. What request did Daniel make?
3. What was the result?

What Do You Think

1. Do you think Daniel trusted God to help him when he refused the king's food?
2. Would you have been afraid to ask the same request?
3. How do you think God felt about Daniel not eating the king's food?

What R U Going To Do

Daniel was single-minded in his desire to honor God by not eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. One way you can be single-minded is to read your Bible every day this week. If you do, tell your small group leader next week.

Core Comp

Single-mindedness - I pay attention to what God thinks is important for my life.

Memory Verse

Philippians 3:19b-20 – *Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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