

# DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS

DANIEL 1:8-16

## SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 1:8-16 in your favorite Bible. As you read, remember that the Word of God is alive and working in you (Hebrews 4:12).

In the previous lesson, we studied the historical circumstances of Daniel and his friends, newly exiled in Babylon. In today's lesson, we zero in on Daniel's faithfulness to God while living in a pagan society. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

### ***Daniel 1:8***

*Daniel resolved (1:8):* The word "resolved" carries the idea, "Daniel purposed in his heart," or "Daniel determined in his heart," or "Daniel set upon his heart." He was a man of strong convictions, and he consistently acted on them.

*King's food... wine (1:8):* Why didn't Daniel and his friends want to eat the king's food? Here are four possible explanations.

- The food was prepared by Gentiles, so it was "unclean" according to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Also, the fare probably included foods that were forbidden by the Mosaic Law (see Leviticus 11:1-23; Deuteronomy 14:1-21).
- Pagan nations often devoted food to pagan deities before eating it. If Daniel and his friends had eaten what they were served, they

would have defiled themselves by rendering honor to false gods (see Exodus 34:15).

- Daniel and his friends might have been rejecting the luxurious lifestyle—including the extravagant food—offered to those in the king's court. Perhaps they reasoned that such materialism might defile them or lure them away from complete commitment to God.
- Jewish people drank wine diluted with water (see Major Themes). The Babylonians did not dilute their wine, and “strong drink” was unacceptable to the Jews (see Proverbs 20:1). Moreover, the Babylonians poured their wine on pagan altars in the worship of their deities. Daniel and his friends would have wanted no part of this.

Ultimately, Daniel resolved that even though he lived in a land that did not honor God's Law, he himself would nevertheless do everything possible to continue obeying the Lord's commands. Walking in faithfulness to God was harder in Babylon than in Judah, but God rewarded Daniel's faithfulness.

*Therefore he asked (1:8):* James 2:17 tells us, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” Daniel didn't just make a resolution in his heart (“faith”) but also acted on that resolution (“works”). He took immediate steps to make other arrangements for food.

### **Daniel 1:9-10**

*God gave Daniel favor and compassion (1:9):* God has the power to turn the hearts of unbelieving leaders so that they are favorable to God's people (see Exodus 11:3). He also honors those who first honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30; 2 Chronicles 16:9). Proverbs 16:7 tells us, “When a man's ways please the LORD, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” (See Life Lessons.)

*I fear my lord the king (1:10):* The chief eunuch was charged with overseeing the physical and mental development of Daniel and his friends. If the king was not pleased with this development, that would reflect badly on the chief eunuch, and he could be punished or even lose his life.

*Worse condition (1:10):* Evidenced by looking worse.

*Endanger my head (1:10):* Disappointing the king could result in execution.

**Daniel 1:11-14**

*Daniel said (1:11):* Notice that Daniel did not rebel. He did not use harsh language, raise his voice, or get into a heated argument. Instead, he used good judgment by courteously offering a reasonable alternative to the steward. He came up with a creative solution that avoided offense and enabled him and his friends to remain faithful to God in the process.

*Steward (1:11):* Daniel surmised from the chief eunuch's words that his request for a special diet had been denied. Daniel thus approached the steward who had been placed in charge of the four youths. Daniel requested a ten-day period in which they would be fed only vegetables and water. He implied that he and his friends would have a better appearance in ten days than those eating the king's food. The steward had no authority on his own, so he likely okayed this with the chief eunuch before proceeding. The God who brings favor in the eyes of others was clearly at work behind the scenes here.

*Vegetables (1:12):* The Old Testament word translated "vegetables" means "things grown from seeds." The word could refer either to fresh vegetables or even to wheat or barley grain. Vegetables—things grown from seeds—were a safe choice, for the Mosaic Law did not categorize any vegetables as unclean. Therefore, no matter what vegetables were brought to Daniel and his friends, they would not be defiled.

Some Bible expositors have suggested the possibility that in addition to avoiding defilement, Daniel avoided meat and other foods in order to engage in a kind of fast as an expression of their mourning, having been exiled. One must note, however, that their attitudes before the Babylonians were always upbeat and positive.

*So he listened (1:14):* Daniel's suggestion was okayed and put into practice.

**Daniel 1:15-16**

*Better in appearance and fatter in flesh (1:15):* To be better in appearance and fatter in flesh was taken as evidence that they were healthier than those who ate the king's diet. This was precisely the opposite of what Ashpenaz, the chief eunuch, had feared.

Some scholars have been careful to point out that this verse cannot be taken as a biblical endorsement of vegetarianism. After all, it was ultimately

God who made them healthy and gave them the outer appearance of health. The youths had honored God, and now God honored them by keeping them healthy. Though vegetables are definitely healthy, God ultimately blessed them because they obeyed His will, not simply because they ate vegetables instead of other foods.

Scripture stands against legalists who, for religious reasons, “require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer” (1 Timothy 4:3-5). Acceptable foods certainly include meat (Genesis 9:3).

In Old Testament times, the Jews believed—based on divine revelation—that health came from pleasing God, while sickness and disease came from displeasing Him. God Himself affirmed in Exodus 15:26, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.” God commanded, “You shall serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you” (Exodus 23:25). Scripture promises that if you “fear the LORD, and turn away from evil...it will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones” (Proverbs 3:7-8).

*So the steward took away (1:16):* As a result of the ten-day experiment, a permanent diet of vegetables and water was allowed for Daniel and his friends.

## MAJOR THEMES

1. *Avoiding defilement.* The ancient Jews believed that a number of things could render a person unclean. For example, a woman was rendered ceremonially unclean during menstruation and following childbirth (Leviticus 12:2-5; Ezekiel 16:4). Touching a dead animal rendered one unclean (Leviticus 11:24-40), as did touching any dead body (Numbers 19:11). A person with a skin infection was considered unclean (Leviticus 13:3). Sexual discharges rendered one unclean (Leviticus 15:2). The Samaritans of New Testament times were considered unclean because they were of mixed ancestry (Israelite

and Assyrian—see John 4:9). Likewise, eating certain prohibited foods rendered one unclean or defiled (Leviticus 11:46-47; Ezekiel 4:13-14; Hosea 9:3-4). This is what Daniel was seeking to avoid (Daniel 1:8).

2. *Drinking wine.* In day-to-day meals in biblical times, wine was often mixed with water as a means of purifying it. A popular beverage of ancient times was a mixture of twenty parts water mixed with one part wine. It was essentially wine-flavored water. In other cases, one part wine might be mixed with one part water (or no water at all), and this was considered strong wine. Drinking wine in moderation is permissible for Christians (John 2:9; 1 Timothy 3:3, 8; but also see Romans 14:21; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:31). Drunkenness is prohibited (Ephesians 5:18).
3. *A good conscience.* Daniel and his friends were concerned not only about moral purity but also about ceremonial purity. They wanted to avoid *any* kind of defilement. They may have been forced to move to Babylon, but it was important to them to maintain a good conscience in all things. This is a thread that runs all through Daniel. We are reminded of the apostle Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 1:19 for young Timothy to keep a strong faith as well as a good conscience (see also 1 Peter 3:16). Daniel is a good example of the kind of man Paul wanted Timothy to be.

### **DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES**

*Unclean foods the Israelites were to avoid*—Leviticus 11:46-47; Ezekiel 4:13-14; Hosea 9:3-4; 1 Corinthians 8

*Health promised for obedience*—Exodus 15:26; 23:25; Deuteronomy 7:15; 2 Kings 20:5; Psalms 30:2; 91:5-6; 103:3; Proverbs 3:7-8; 4:20-22; James 5:14-15; 3 John 2

### **LIFE LESSONS**

1. *Be faithful to God.* Daniel and his companions were faithful to God. You and I are likewise called to be faithful to God (meditate on Proverbs 3:3; Matthew 25:23; Romans 12:12; and Revelation 2:10). Scripture reveals that as we walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit, faithfulness is part of

the fruit of the Spirit that will be produced in our lives (Galatians 5:16, 22). It makes good sense to therefore depend on the Holy Spirit every day of our lives!

2. *God gives favor.* Scripture often displays God giving His people favor in the eyes of others. For example, when Joseph was in prison, God gave him favor in the eyes of the prison warden (Genesis 39:21). God likewise gave Daniel favor in the eyes of the chief eunuch (Daniel 1:9). God can cause people to look upon us favorably as well (see Exodus 3:21; 11:3; 12:36). Why not incorporate this into your prayers? “Lord, please grant me favor in the eyes of...”
3. *Be a person of integrity.* Daniel was clearly a man of integrity. The Bible speaks a great deal about what it means to be a man of integrity.
  - “Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways” (Proverbs 28:6).
  - “Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool” (Proverbs 19:1).
  - “The integrity of the upright guides them” (Proverbs 11:3).
  - “The righteous who walks in his integrity—blessed are his children after him!” (Proverbs 20:7).
  - Daniel was certainly right in line with Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 8:21: “We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of man.” In other words, we aim at integrity both before the Lord and before human beings. Here are some helpful verses worthy of meditation: Psalms 25:21; 26:1; Micah 6:8; Acts 24:16; Titus 2:1-14; Hebrews 13:18; James 1:22-25.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Does Daniel’s resolution in verse 8 motivate you to follow his lead and make your own resolution?

2. What do you learn about God's sovereignty in verse 9 in regard to authority figures in your life? (Contemplate how Proverbs 21:1 might relate to this.)
3. What impresses you most about how Daniel handled himself in his circumstances?