

UNDER- STANDING

DANIEL AND REVELATION

M A R K F I N L E Y



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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to those faithful, committed, tireless Adventist evangelists that night after night preach the prophetic Word. At times, their audiences are large, and at other times, they are small. They preach in civic auditoriums, churches, tents, schools, or any other venue where they can get an audience. At times, they preach in large metropolitan city centers, and at other times, in small country villages.

They are fearless preachers of God's Word. Their messages are shaped by the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, not by popular culture. Their one goal is to proclaim the Christ of prophecy to a world on the verge of eternity. They are not out to win a popularity contest; they are out to preach the Word.

I salute these stalwart preachers whose minds are captive to the Word, who nightly proclaim the Word, and who unashamedly call people to make eternal decisions. To these—my colleagues in evangelistic ministry—this book is dedicated.

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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century might be dubbed “The Era of Uncertainty.” As we gaze across the horizon of history, we see only a few periods that have been as uncertain as the present. This world is facing some extremely serious issues. The instability of the Middle East, the rising nuclear threats of Iran and North Korea, the tensions between the United States, Russia, and China, the shaky world economy, global warming, rapidly spreading worldwide pandemics and international food shortages, and a host of other regional and global problems lead millions to nervously ask, “What does the future hold? Where is this world headed? How can we face the future with greater confidence?”

The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation provide answers for honest-hearted people seeking to understand the uncertainties of our time. These prophetic revelations are filled with hope for today, tomorrow, and forever. Although this world may seem out of control, prophecy reveals a God who is still in control. As you read these pages, you will discover the secret to unlock these ancient predictions. Your faith will be strengthened. Your understanding will be enlarged. Your relationship with God will be deepened.

These prophecies are not merely about mystic symbols, strange beasts, and cryptic images. Every chapter focuses on the living Christ and His ability to change lives. Daniel and Revelation will come alive to you as you carefully study each chapter. The Holy Spirit will enable you to see truth from a new perspective and in a fresh way. You will understand the deep spiritual principles behind every prophecy and discover your place in the conflict of the ages.

A crisis of enormous proportions will soon break upon our planet. You can be ready for those earth-shaking events set to overtake the world with overwhelming surprise. The same God that inspired Daniel to pen His prophetic messages and visited John on the Isle of Patmos with angelic revelations will lift your vision, inspire your heart, and prepare you for what is coming. I pray that as you read *Understanding Daniel and Revelation*, you will be drawn preciously near to Jesus Christ—the Author and Center of all prophecy.



Understanding Daniel

THE GOD WHO TURNS DEFEAT INTO VICTORY

Daniel 1

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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, **4** young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. **5** And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the

end of that time they might serve before the king. **6** Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. **7** To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

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; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. **9** Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. **10** And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set

over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** “Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 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.” **14** So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies. **16** Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

17 As for these four young men, God

gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. **19** Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

21 Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.



Although it was written centuries ago, the book of Daniel is not just a musty, historical document filled with dates and facts. The more we study this book, the more Christ will appear in its pages, coming close to us to help us in the problems and challenges we face in our own lives each day. The more we understand the prophecies of Daniel, the better we will understand our place in earth’s history and how to fill the role Jesus has for us in these last days.

Daniel’s book has a message that speaks to us in our generation, but we are not the only ones who have found meaning in its prophecies. In the fifteenth century, Christopher Columbus (1451–1506), the early discoverer of the Americas, was a diligent student of the book of Daniel. One of the things that compelled Columbus to set out on his discovery of the New World was his study of the prophecies of Daniel. Columbus believed that Daniel predicted end-time events. He believed that as the world came to an end, God would open up new continents for the preaching

of the gospel. His understanding of Daniel was one of the factors that led Columbus to find the New World, where the gospel could be preached to those who had never heard of Jesus.

Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727), the famous British mathematician and scholar, was also a student of the book of Daniel. As he studied Daniel’s prophecies, their mathematical precision confirmed his belief that the Bible was truly God’s inspired Word.

Timothy Dwight (1752–1817) was the eighth president of Yale College (later, Yale University). During the time of the French Revolution, a number of students at Yale began to accept the arguments of European scholars that questioned the existence of God and doubted the truthfulness of the Bible. These atheistic students challenged professors on the campus with their unbelief.

Timothy Dwight announced, “I’d like to meet all the students in the chapel.”

The students filed into the chapel, including those who had been outspoken about their unbelief. Timothy Dwight came into the room carrying a large load of history books. He put them on a table, and then he asked these students to present all their arguments against the Bible. So the unbelieving students presented their arguments. After they had given their most persuasive reasons for unbelief, Professor Dwight opened his Bible to the book of Daniel and began to read its prophecies—some of the same prophecies we will be studying as we explore this book. As Professor Dwight read Daniel’s prophecies, he then turned to the stack of history books on the table at the front of the room. He read from Daniel, and then he compared Daniel’s words with the history books. As he presented the facts of history compared with Bible prophecy, the students were amazed. History confirmed the prophecies of this ancient Bible book.

In the end, the students stood up and applauded Professor Dwight. That chapel meeting led to a magnificent spiritual revival at Yale College.

You are not alone in your desire to study the book of Daniel. Bible students down through the centuries have found meaning and comfort in its pages for their lives and their day. And as we, here in the twenty-first century, study Daniel together, God Himself will reveal amazing truths to us.

Daniel’s book is divided into two segments: prophecies and stories. The first six chapters are mostly stories, and the last six are mostly prophecies. The prophecies deal with the great sweep of history down through the ages. They reveal time periods that lead us from Daniel’s day, some six hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, down to the time of the end and Jesus’ second coming. The stories illustrate how we are to prepare for the time of the end. They talk about faith, courage, and hope. The prophecies tell us *when*; the stories tell us *how*.

The importance of the book

Of all the books of the Bible, Daniel is the only one that Jesus Himself specifically counsels us to study. In Matthew 24, Jesus describes what the world will be like just before He returns. He talks about rising crime and violence, earthquakes and

Prophecy enables us to understand that the Bible is not just myth, allegory, or historical drama. Prophecy and its fulfillment show us that the Bible is indeed true and that it really is God's Word.

famines, and social conflicts. He pictures a world in which nation is rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Then He says, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand) . . ." (Matthew 24:15).

Jesus points us to the book of Daniel in the context of a world in turmoil just before He returns. And He tells us two things we should be doing. He says (1) read Daniel's prophecies, and (2) understand them. If Jesus says to read Daniel's prophecies, and if Jesus says to understand them, it must be important to spend time studying this book.

Have you ever wondered why God gave Daniel the prophecies that appear in his book? And have you ever wondered why Daniel wrote them out for us to read and study so many hundreds of years later? What really is the purpose of prophecy? Is it just to demonstrate that God knows the future? Is it just to satisfy our curiosity?

In Matthew 24, Jesus warns us about false prophets that will arise in the days before His coming. They will try to deceive those who are waiting for His return. Then Jesus says,

"See, I have told you beforehand.

"Therefore . . . do not believe [their deceptive lies]" (verses 25, 26).

One purpose for prophecies such as those we find in Daniel is to enable us to know what's coming in order not to be deceived by Satan's deceptions. Knowing what lies ahead helps us see clearly when we are surrounded by confusion and deception.

The more we study prophecy and see its fulfillment, the more it builds our confidence in the Bible. Prophecy enables us to understand that the Bible is not just myth, allegory, or historical drama. Prophecy and its fulfillment show us that the Bible is indeed true and that it really is God's Word.

Of course, there are Bible scholars who say Daniel was not a prophet at all. Some have said that he simply made up the visions he recorded and that they were just the figment of his imagination. But many of these scholars are largely silent today because the prophecies of Daniel have been confirmed historically. They are accurate history.

Some critical Bible scholars have changed the argument against Daniel's prophecies. Before, they used to say the prophecies were just myths and allegories—that there is no archeological or historical evidence that they came true. But today, there is such an abundance of historical and archeological evidence supporting the accuracy of Daniel's prophecies that these scholars have come up with a new objection. They say, "Daniel's prophecies are so accurate that he must have written them *after* the events took place. He wasn't really a prophet; he just wrote what had already happened as if he were predicting it beforehand."

But what does Jesus say? Jesus called Daniel a "prophet" (verse 15). Jesus said we should read and understand his prophecies.

Before we get into the book of Daniel and begin studying the first chapter, we need to ask: To what specific time period do Daniel's prophecies apply? If we are to read and understand them, we need to know when they are pointing to in earth's history. In the last chapter of Daniel, God Himself answers this question. He says, "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book *until the time of the end*" (Daniel 12:4; emphasis added). And verse 9 says, "The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

The prophecies of Daniel apply to "the time of the end." To the days we are living in. To the days of social instability, warring nations, rising crime and violence, and the earthquakes and famines that Jesus described in Matthew 24 as a description of what the world would be like just before His return.

The theme of the book

The title of the book is simply *Daniel*, named for the prophet who wrote it, recording his experiences and the prophecies God gave him. Names in the Bible usually have meaning. What does the name Daniel mean? It comes from two Hebrew words. *Dan* was one of the twelve tribes of Israel—the tribe of judges. The short word, *el*, attached to *Dan*, refers to the name of God, *Elohim*. So interpreted literally, Daniel's name means "the God of judgment."

Today, when we think of a judge, we often think of someone who passes sentence on us, someone who condemns us. But that was not the Old Testament concept of judgment. In the Old Testament, a judge is the one who sets all things right, the one who pronounces righteous judgment. A judge is the one who vindicates and

exonerates. One major theme of the book of Daniel is “the God of judgment and justice.” The book of Daniel presents the God of the universe, who will ultimately set all things right. Kingdoms rise and fall, but God sits upon His throne, holding the destiny of the nations in His hand. In the controversy between good and evil, in the panorama between right and wrong, in the battle for the throne of the universe, the God of justice, the God of judgment, the God of righteousness will set all things right. That is the overarching theme of Daniel’s book.

The controversy of good versus evil

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it” (Daniel 1:1). The book begins with two cities and two kings—Babylon and Jerusalem; Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim. Babylon was the center of rebellion against God, the center of confusion, the center of error, the center of apostasy. Babylon, that mighty city, attacked Jerusalem, God’s city, the city of truth, the city of obedience. Right away, we are introduced to the great controversy of good versus evil. Wrong attacks right.

And in this case, wrong triumphs. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacks Jerusalem and is victorious. Sometimes we hear people ask, “If God is good, why does evil so often seem to triumph?” “If God is good, why did my husband get cancer?” “If God is so good, why did my parents get divorced?” “If God is so good, why was my daughter killed by a drunk driver who walked away from the accident unhurt?” “If God is so good, why does wrong so often seem to triumph?”

There is a well-known poem by James Russell Lowell that contains these lines: “Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.”

Daniel chapter 1 begins with a great defeat for the true God. God’s city, Jerusalem, is in ruins. God’s people are in captivity and bondage. The very first verse of Daniel 1 introduces the great controversy theme—the conflict between Christ and Satan, good and evil, right and wrong. That conflict unfolds all through this first chapter. After besieging and taking Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar looked at the Jewish youths and chose a few of the best of them to bring back to Babylon as captives. There they would be educated in the university of Babylon, brainwashed, and sent back to their homeland as puppet rulers. That was standard practice in the ancient world, and nations still follow that practice today.

When the Russians invaded Afghanistan, they took Afghani youth and put them in special schools in Russia, where they were taught the philosophies of Marxism

and Communism. The idea was to send them back to Afghanistan to be puppet rulers for the Kremlin. Hitler often did the same with youth from the nations that he overran in World War II. After inculcating them with the philosophies of Nazi Germany, they were to return to their own countries and propagate what they had learned in Germany. And that is what King Nebuchadnezzar did as well.

The first chapter of Daniel tells us about the young people Nebuchadnezzar brought back to Babylon following his conquest of Jerusalem.

“Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king’s descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans” (verses 3, 4).

The word translated “children” is a special Hebrew word better translated as “teenagers” or “young adults.” Daniel was probably seventeen or eighteen years old when he was taken captive along with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (verse 6). Notice the characteristics of these young men:

- “*No blemish, but good-looking.*” Physically, they were handsome, muscular, and physically fit.
- “*Gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand.*” They were intelligent, educated, and fast learners.
- “*Ability to serve in the king’s palace.*” These were young men who were capable of assuming responsibility, who knew how to handle themselves and fit in with those in positions of power.
- “*Whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.*” The plan was to indoctrinate them in the language and ways of Babylon.

These young men were to be enrolled in a three-year training program, at the end of which they would be tested before the king. Nebuchadnezzar appointed them a daily provision of the same food and wine that he ate and drank. They were to be educated in the culture and religion of Babylon (verse 5).

Why names matter

To complete this brainwashing process of Daniel and his three friends, the king changed their Hebrew names to Babylonian ones. He gave them names that would correspond with the heathen gods of Babylon. Daniel’s name became Belteshazzar;

Hananiah was now called Shadrach; Mishael was renamed Meshach, and Azariah became Abed-Nego (verse 7).

The king wanted to change their names because he wanted to change their identities. As we have already noted, names meant something in Bible times; they were not just names. In Genesis, Jacob, whose name means “deceiver,” deceived his father regarding the birthright (Genesis 27). But when Jacob met God and struggled with Him for a blessing, his name was changed from “Jacob” to “Israel” (Genesis 32). The name Israel means “one who has prevailed.” A change of names means a change of character. Jacob, the deceiver, had become Israel, the one who prevails with God.

By changing the names of these Hebrew captives, Nebuchadnezzar indicated that their characters were to be changed. They were to become “Babylonians” in their outlook and loyalties. We’ve already noted that Daniel’s name meant “the God who judges” or “God is my judge.” All through his captivity in Babylon, all through this brainwashing process, all through the time that Nebuchadnezzar was trying to influence his mind, Daniel would say to himself, “My name is Daniel. God is my judge. God is on the throne. God is going to set all things right—not King Nebuchadnezzar.”

What did Daniel’s new name mean? The name Belteshazzar means “the keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel.” In connection with Daniel’s new name, there is something very interesting. In describing Nebuchadnezzar’s victory over Jerusalem, Daniel 1:2 says, “The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.”

Nebuchadnezzar ordered his soldiers to take some of the sacred objects from the temple in Jerusalem and place them in the pagan temple of the Babylonian god Bel. This signified that the god of Babylon was superior to the God of the Hebrews.

Bel, sometimes known also as Marduk, was the chief deity of the thirteen gods of Babylon. Daniel’s new name, Belteshazzar, means “the keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel.” By this name change, the king was saying, “Daniel, God is not your judge. Jerusalem is in ruins. We have the sacred vessels from His temple that you Hebrews use in your worship of Him. Our god, Bel, is in charge of those sacred vessels now. And you are no longer ‘Daniel,’ but ‘Belteshazzar,’ the one who cooperates with Bel, the keeper of the sacred, hidden treasures that I have taken from Jerusalem.”

The king did the same thing with Daniel’s three friends. Hananiah’s name means “the Lord is gracious to me.” Growing up, every time the child said, “My name is Hananiah,” he was reminded, “The Lord is gracious to me.” Every time his mother

called him, he was reminded, “The Lord is gracious to me.” Nebuchadnezzar declared, “Your name will be ‘Shadrach,’ which means ‘inspiration of the sun.’ It is the sun god who shines graciously on you.”

The name Mishael means “one who is God-like.” We have a similar name in English—Michael. Mishael’s name denoted one who has patience and kindness and love in a godlike way. Nebuchadnezzar changed Mishael’s name to Meshach, meaning “the servant of the goddess of Sheba.” Every name change Nebuchadnezzar made represented a change of focus from the God of heaven to a focus on a pagan god of Babylon. He changed Azariah’s name to Abed-Nego, meaning “the servant of the god, Nebo.” Azariah means “the Lord is my helper.” Nebuchadnezzar was saying, “The Lord is no longer your helper. You are a captive in Babylon; you will never see your mother or father again. Your God cannot help you. You are to serve the Babylonian gods now.”

Resisting the pressure to conform

Can you imagine what life was like for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah during those early days in Babylon? Torn from their homes in Judah, they were confused and perplexed regarding why God had allowed the pagan Babylonians to defeat their city and carry them off to a strange, foreign land. They were just teenagers, facing incredible pressures to conform to the materialistic, sex-centered, morally jaded, thrill-seeking society all around them. All they had to do was to go along with the king’s program, and a rich, secure future lay ahead. It would be so easy. To resist would be so difficult.

Why, do you think, did God begin Daniel’s book with a story and not a prophecy?

God knows that at the time of the end, the days in which we live, society will attempt to brainwash His people just as the king of Babylon tried to brainwash Daniel and his friends. God doesn’t start out this book with some spectacular prophecy that predicts events in the future. He starts out telling the story of a young man and his friends who are far from home. Four young men whose hearts are not in the society in which they find themselves physically. Four young men in a foreign country. Four young men who are under unbelievable pressure to go along with evil.

Some young people today say, “You know, it’s impossible to really be a Christian and serve God because everybody in my high school is having premarital sex. Everybody in my high school is involved in drugs. Everybody in my high school is going to parties and drinking alcohol. It’s impossible to serve God in this kind of environment.” Daniel and his friends could have said the same thing. But they didn’t.

Some men say, “I work in a very rough factory where everyone curses and swears,

and everybody tells off-color jokes. In the environment I work in, it is impossible to serve God.” Some businessmen say, “Look, you can’t serve God and be completely honest. If you are going to get ahead in business, you have to cut corners here and there.” Daniel and his friends could have said the same thing. But they didn’t.

The battle for your mind

God begins the book of Daniel with the story of a young man in a corrupt, godless society whose mind could easily have been shaped by that society. In fact, this young man was under almost incomprehensible pressure to conform to the pressures of Babylon. But Daniel 1:8 says, “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; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”

“Daniel *purposed* in his heart.” What does that mean? It means that Daniel *decided*. It means that he *determined*. It means that he *chose*. Daniel *decided* in his heart. He *determined* in his heart. He *chose* in the inner recesses of his heart. In the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, the “heart” is used in a special way to refer to the seat of both the intellect and the emotions. It is the center of the thought processes. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all diligence.” Proverbs 23:7 says, “As [a person] thinks in his heart, so is he.”

The book of Daniel begins with the story of a young man who makes a settled choice in the depths of his mind and emotions that he will not defile himself by conforming to the evil around him. And it does so because the real battle at the time of the end, in the last days of earth’s history, is not some battle in the Middle East. The real battle just before Jesus returns is the battle for your mind. The devil will do everything he can through this godless, secular society to influence your thought processes because the mind is the seat of your thoughts and emotions. Satan was there in Babylon, doing everything he possibly could to influence Daniel’s mind and emotions through the enticements of the pagan culture around him. But Daniel “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.” The story in Daniel chapter 1 illustrates how God would have us react to the culture in which we live. Like Daniel, we need to purpose in our hearts that we will follow God’s way, not the world’s way. In these remaining days of earth’s history before Jesus returns, it’s important that we determine that by His grace, we will remain faithful to Him and to His will for our lives.

The power to choose

You see, we are not merely highly evolved animals. We can choose. We can exercise

our power to make decisions about how we will live. And if we ask Him, God will help us to carry out those decisions. The will is the governing power in our human nature that brings all other faculties under its sway. Human beings are different from the animal creation.

For example, some years ago, scientists at one of the great East Coast universities were conducting experiments with monkeys. They noted that there was an area in their brains that controlled pleasure. So these scientists connected an electrode to this “pleasure center” deep within the monkey’s brain. Monkeys operate on a physical, biological level, not on the human level of reason or choice. The scientists rigged up a button that could be pushed, and every time that button was pushed, an electrical stimulation went into

the area of the monkey’s brain that controlled pleasure. It gave the monkey a sense of feeling really happy. They put the monkey in a cage with the button to see how strong the desire would be for the monkey to experience pleasure. It wasn’t long until the monkey figured out the relationship of the button to that happy feeling. It began pushing the button repeatedly.

They put a female monkey in the cage with him. He didn’t even look at her; he just kept pressing the button. They put food in the cage, but he was more interested in the button. Nothing they did could distract him from the button and the pleasure it provided.

That’s what the devil tries to do with us. He tries to keep us so focused on the pleasures and attractions of this world that we will have little interest in the world to come. But human beings are not monkeys. Neither are we evolved monkeys. However, there are some people who act as that monkey did. They keep returning to the things that bring them temporary, fleeting pleasures. These things may be destroying their lives even here on earth, but they continue pressing the pleasure button again and again.

God blesses Daniel’s faithfulness

All the pleasures of the most powerful kingdom on earth at the time lay within

Like Daniel, we need to purpose in our hearts that we will follow God’s way, not the world’s way. In these remaining days of earth’s history before Jesus returns, it’s important that we determine that by His grace, we will remain faithful to Him and to His will for our lives.

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Daniel's grasp. They were his for the taking, but verse 8 says he made a decision: he decided not to defile himself with the king's food and drink. Furthermore, he decided to give God an opportunity to show His power. Daniel proposed a test.

"Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, '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' " (verses 11–13).

One reason Daniel decided he would not eat the king's food and drink his wine was that it was rich, unhealthful food, much of which was "unclean" according to the regulations God had laid down for Israel. But even more important, Daniel knew that this food had been offered to the idols of the Babylonian gods before it was served to the royal household. To eat this food was to participate in the ceremony of idolatry. Daniel would not eat food that had been offered to idols. Doing so would be acknowledging the deity of these pagan gods. It would be repudiating the God of heaven.

When Daniel purposed in his heart to serve God, God purposed in His heart to bless Daniel. What was the result of this ten-day test?

At the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm (verses 15–20).

God blessed Daniel's faithfulness with health and wisdom. As the king examined the captives he had brought from his conquest of Jerusalem, Daniel and his friends who had remained faithful to God stood out in stark contrast to the young men who had compromised their principles by eating the king's idolatrous food.

God will bless you as He did Daniel

During the three years of training, the steward “took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink” (verse 16). When a person decides to remain faithful to what he or she knows is right, there will always be things that will be taken away. But God will replace them with things that are better. He will pour out His blessings “pressed down, shaken together, and running over” (Luke 6:38). Unless you allow God to take away the things that separate you from Him, you cannot receive the rich blessings He has in store for you.

There are three steps to receiving God’s blessings in your life, as did Daniel and his friends.

First, determine to please God. Like Daniel, purpose in your heart to do nothing that you consciously know displeases God.

Second, allow God to take away the obstacles. When God puts His finger on some sin in your life, no matter how much you cherish that thing, no matter how much pleasure it gives you to push that button, recognize that God knows how to please you even more than you know how to please yourself. If you do that, you will be much happier in life. Allow God to take away any obstacles in your life and open your heart to receive His rich blessings.

Third, rely on God’s power and grace to enable you to follow through on the decision you have made to be faithful to Him. It’s true that we are weak and that in our own strength, we often are unable to do the things we know we should—the things we *want* to do. Even the great apostle Paul had this problem. He says, “The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice” (Romans 7:19). We can all identify with Paul on that! What is the answer? The apostle goes on to say, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me . . . ? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (verses 24, 25). When we purpose in our heart to be faithful to God, He will help us. He will give us the power to resist temptation and do what is right.

Good triumphs over evil

Daniel chapter 1 begins with a great defeat for the true God. God’s city, Jerusalem, is in ruins. God’s man, Daniel, and his friends are in captivity. Evil seems to have triumphed over good. But when we come to the end of this first chapter, Daniel and his friends have triumphed over the temptations of Babylon. They have stood up faithfully for the God of heaven, and God has demonstrated His power in their lives.

“None was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which

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the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm” (verses 19, 20).

Daniel graduated with his PhD from the university of Babylon, untarnished. God’s man stood as a stalwart witness of honesty and integrity.

Tucked away in the last verse of chapter 1 are words that are filled with meaning—“Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus” (verse 21). Kings rise and fall. Empires rise and fall. Babylon was the dominant world empire from 605 to 539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar was followed on the throne by his son and grandson. But the Bible says that Daniel continued from the kingdom of Babylon to the kingdom of Media-Persia. Through all the long years of his life, Daniel served God. Like Daniel, there are men and women in our world today who have one overriding desire in life—a passion in their hearts to serve God. And, like Daniel, they will continue. The Babylons of this world will collapse like a deck of cards. The cheap tinsel of secularism and godlessness is soon to crumble like a sandcastle before the waves, but there is a new King coming. God’s men and God’s women who purpose in their hearts to serve Him will pass from one kingdom to the next, and live forever and ever and ever.

That’s the message that Daniel chapter 1 has for us today. God will bless those who purpose in their hearts to remain faithful to Him, and they will live with Him forever.