

DANIEL'S CLIMB TO LEADERSHIP (DANIEL 1:15-21)

When we first met Daniel and his three friends, the king of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar) was conquering the world. And after conquering Egypt (the super power of their day), Nebuchadnezzar swooped in and conquered Jerusalem and carried off the best and the brightest to work in his administration back in Babylon. Daniel and the boys were among the best and the brightest in Jerusalem.

Then last week, we left off with Daniel asking if they would be allowed to not defile themselves by eating the king's food and drinking his wine. They didn't want to break the Jewish dietary laws, but Daniel also knew that eating from the king's table would suggest that Daniel was in allegiance with the king's worldview and his gods. So, Daniel asked if they could eat nothing but vegetables and water for ten days and then be compared to the others who ate from the king's table.

So, the king's servant has a dilemma. He likes Daniel and the boys, but he also fears the king. If Daniel and his friends were not well taken care of, he could lose not only his job but his head.¹ That's where we left off.



So, what was the result? Did Daniel look as good or better than the rest after ten days?

Daniel 1:15–21 “At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s food.”¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.¹⁸ At the end of the time [3-year course], when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were

¹ Miller, S. R. (1994). *Daniel* (Vol. 18, p. 68). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

in all his kingdom. ²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus."

We don't know how many students went through the entire 3-year course – Babylon U – but when it was over, Nebuchadnezzar examined them personally. Since these new graduates were going to become his personal advisers, the king wanted to be sure he was getting the best.²

And, notice how God allowed these guys to rise to the top for His glory...

1. They looked better than the rest.

When **verse 15** says they were "fatter" than all the others, it doesn't mean they were overweight. It literally means they were *healthier*³ – they were in better shape and appearance than all their classmates who were eating the king's food.

You see, there were three things in play with Daniel's 10-day experiment:

- 1) The *favor of God*, persuading the steward to listen to Daniel.
- 2) The *wisdom of God*, giving Daniel the idea for the test.
- 3) The *blessing of God*, causing the test to work.

God's favor was all over Daniel because he honored the Lord in all his ways. In the book of 1 Samuel God says, "*Those who honor Me I will honor*" (2:30). And this is playing out in the life of Daniel.

Illustration: I don't know if you've ever seen the movie called "Chariots of Fire," but it's about the true story of Eric Liddell running in the 1924 Paris Olympics. His best event – the 100 Meter—had been scheduled for a Sunday but he withdrew because he didn't want to run on the Lord's Day. So, he became a worldwide laughingstock. His team switched him to the 400m race, but it was a totally different race that you train for in a completely different way. So, he's at a huge disadvantage. In the dressing room before the event, a man handed him a folded piece of paper. Written on the paper was 1 Samuel 2:30, where God says, "*Those who honor Me I will honor.*" Inspired by those words, Eric Liddell not only broke the world record in the 400m; he won the gold medal. You see, God honors those who honor Him!⁴

KEEP IN MIND: this is NOT a formula where everything always works out

² Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (p. 19). Victor.

³ Swanson, J. (1997). In *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁴ *Today's Turning Point* e-devotional by David Jeremiah; Friday, April 22, 2016

for the person who honors God. Daniel is going to honor God at every step, but it will sometimes get him into serious trouble. But it was definitely God's favor that allowed Daniel and his friends to look better than all the others after the 10-day experiment.

2. They learned better than the rest.

Daniel 1:17-20 "As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom."

Verse 17 makes it clear that Daniel and the boys were given intellectual ability from the Lord – *not* because of their diet. Veggies can't do that! It was because of their faith and commitment to his Word that "God gave them" the "skill, wisdom, and understanding" beyond everyone else in Babylon U! And veggies can't give you the ability to understand and interpret visions and dreams.

It's a reminder that all intellect, gifts, talents, and abilities ultimately come from the Lord...

John 3:27 "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven."

Of course, Nebuchadnezzar was taking credit for their brilliance – "*Look how smart we've made these boys!*" But Daniel understood that his gifts and talents were given to him by God. And throughout his life, Daniel used those talents and abilities to honor God rather than himself.



Do you? Do you acknowledge that your mental, physical, and creative abilities are from God? Do you use them for HIS glory or for yours?

You see, even though Nebuchadnezzar was preparing them for positions in his royal court, they were actually being prepared by God Himself. God

was giving them knowledge and understanding for the job *ahead* of them. For example...

- The word **“knowledge”** or **“learning”** (vs.17) means the ability to *reason* and *process* information. They were able to think clearly and logically – beyond the ability of the average teenager.
- The word **“understanding”** (vs.17) refers to *insight*. They were able to interpret things in their *true* light – to see things for what they really are. Education and information alone can’t do that.

Daniel and the boys had to study and apply themselves, but *God* gave them skill to learn the material, discernment to understand it, and wisdom to apply it in a way that would honor God and His Word.

“There’s no reason why Christian students on secular campuses shouldn’t be among the finest students who win some of the highest awards to the glory of God.” – Warren Wiersbe

We see this throughout the Bible...

- **Moses** was raised in Pharaoh’s palace, and he was “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). But God gave Moses skill to learn the material, discernment to understand it, and wisdom to apply it in a way that still honored God.
- **Esther & Mordecai** knew the teachings of Persia, but God gave them skill to learn the material, discernment to understand it, and wisdom to apply it in a God honoring way.
- **Nehemiah** rose through the ranks of the Persian court and served in the palace of king Artaxerxes. But God gave them skill to learn the material, discernment to understand it, and wisdom to apply it according to God’s Word.
- **Joseph** did the same as he lived in Potiphar’s palace in Egypt.

And God will help *you* do the same if you RESOLVE in your heart to honor Him and His word!

As we’ll see in the coming chapters, all four of these boys were RESOLVED in their love and obedience to God. But **verse 17b** says Daniel was superior *even to his three friends* in one area – he had the God-given ability to understand visions and dreams. And that seems random right now, but you’ll see why that’s important in the next chapter.

BUT, before you start thinking, “Everything seems to be easy for Daniel!” – remember their situation. Keep in mind, these are real people. These high-school aged boys watched as their homeland was invaded, their families killed, their church/temple desecrated, their future as husbands and fathers destroyed, and their names changed to give praise to false gods.



Do you feel like you've been put into a difficult environment where it's hard for you to be a faithful Christian?

The truth is, Daniel probably has you beat. But his environment didn't stop him from remaining faithful to the Lord, which leads us to...

3. They lasted longer than the rest.

Verse 21 says, “Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.” As we'll see in the coming weeks, Daniel would go on to serve under four different kings and live to be at least 80 years old. He never returned home – instead, Daniel lived most of his life in a foreign land. He became one of the most influential people in human history! Daniel shows us that success doesn't depend on circumstances; it depends on the faithfulness of God! ⁵

Notice what Daniel says when he's an old man at the end of his life...

Daniel 12:3 “And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above [heavens]; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

This is Daniel, describing the kind of life that God allowed him to lead – even though he lived in a VERY difficult environment where kings and kingdoms came and went. But Daniel was the one constant because God's favor was on his life!

In fact, the story of *Daniel* actually whispers the name of *Jesus*...

- Like Daniel, Jesus was a Royal Son from the tribe of Judah.
- Like Daniel, Jesus would have to leave His home and be sent to a foreign land to bear witness to the one true God.
- Like Daniel, Jesus would live in a sinful world without defiling himself (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:21–25).
- Like Daniel, Jesus's teachers were amazed at his wisdom and understanding at such a young age (Luke 2:47).

⁵ *Agents of Babylon* study guide by David Jeremiah; pg. 14

You see, God is looking for those who dare to be a Daniel...

2 Chronicles 16:9a "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him..."

And God's eyes are roaming throughout this room right now, looking for those who dare to be a Daniel!

Small Groups