



QUALIFIED TO SERVE • Pillars for Ministry

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Daniel 1

Introduction

The prophetic book of Daniel is the record of four Hebrews who were taken into captivity in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar besieged Judah in 605 B.C. No older than college students at the beginning of their captivity, they were trained to serve in the palace of the king. “Ten times better than all the rest,” these four set themselves apart as different from the other captives and palace officials. Because of their walks with the Lord, relationships with others in the palace, and their excellent work, they were able to draw praise to God – so much so, that the wicked king of a pagan nation exclaimed (in chapter 4), “How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation.”

Daniel was written to be a testimony to the sovereign, enduring glory of God. Since our lives are to be that too, there is much here we should learn. Since Daniel and his friends were able to make that glory known in an entirely secular environment, there is also much that those who work in the marketplace should be able to emulate. Let’s take a look at chapter 1 and see what groundwork they lay for ministry.

The book opens with a brief account of the Babylonian captivity. Read 2 Chronicles 36 to get a slightly broader context. The important thing to understand, is that God was judging Judah, and allowing a wicked nation to subdue them, in response to years of sin and idolatry. This was warned of by the prophets repeatedly. Jeremiah predicted the coming judgment, and also told that it would last for seventy years, at which time God would restore His people. It would be helpful for you to read through Jeremiah 25:1-14 and 29:1-14 to see this.

Walk with God

It was the custom of Babylon to take the best young men from conquered nations, and train them to serve in the palace. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among those chosen. In vv. 3-5, we see the Babylonians attempt to give them each a new name, language, culture, and diet as part of this training process. All of this they submit to, except for one element – the diet. It’s curious why the diet, of all things, would be unacceptable to Daniel. The reason is this: the food from the king’s table would have been offered to pagan idols. To eat this food would be to participate in idol worship – something a faithful Jew could not do. You could change Daniel’s name, you could take away his language and make him read your books, but he would not participate in the worship of anyone but the one true God. His walk with God was preeminent above all else.

What’s the Big Idea?

In this study, you will show the three underlying realities that enabled Daniel to have such a profound ministry in an entirely secular environment. These will recur throughout the study so take good note of them now. Draw out his commitments to:

1. Walk with the Lord
2. Develop relationships with colleagues.
3. Pursue excellence in all his responsibilities.

What’s the Problem?

The world is covered with pockets where God’s glory isn’t seen or savored. Unless believers are intentional in building foundations for ministry that is unlikely to change.



Relationships

So what does he do? Does he spit out the wine in the king's face and call him an idolater? No. Tactfully, he asks for permission to not eat this food. He says, "Please." He's building relationships; thinking long term; behaving in a way that will help him win favor with the people for whom and with whom he works.

Then he makes a proposition. "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 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." Daniel is making a pledge. He is saying in effect, "If you will allow us to obey God, we won't let you down. We will be the best servants in the palace." Because of the grace that God showed them, and their civility, the request was granted.

Excellence

At the conclusion of the ten day trial, the verdict comes in: "At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food." But not only are they better in health and appearance, they are better in wisdom and understanding – ten times better than anyone else.

For three years they devoted themselves to learning a new language, studying new literature, and absorbing a new culture. Now they are the best workers in the palace. Do you see what they were doing? By virtue of the grace of God, and their own diligence, they were building a platform for ministry.

Notice that there is no real ministry taking place – not yet anyway. Daniel is laying a foundation for a lifetime of ministry. He's read the prophecies and he knows they will be there for seventy years. And so he is living out the three basic realities upon which all ministry will be built. 1) He is committed to walking with God. 2) He is committed to building relationships. 3) He is committed to excellence in all that is asked of him.

For the rest of the book, those three themes will come up over and over again. They are both an end in and of themselves, and also the means to an end. Together, they converge to form a foundation for ministry, but first, they are valuable by themselves.

We walk with God because He is worthy of our lives. We were made for Him. We pursue relationships because all people were made in His image and bear His glory. God made us for relationships with other people. We work hard because all work has dignity, and was part of the created order before the fall. We are to work "unto the Lord." As we'd expect, obedience to God produces a host of benefits and blessings, not the least of which are opportunities to spread His glory far and wide. The focus of Daniel's ministry is to see the praises of God declared throughout the earth. As we will see, through patient incremental steps, this is achieved at a level Daniel couldn't have dreamed or imagined.

The same goal ought to be in the hearts of the students you are leading, for we are "a people belonging to Him, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light." As they commit to 1) walking with God, 2) building relationships, and 3) pursuing excellence in all that is asked of them, opportunities will arise to make His praises known.

In this study, and in the next five, your job will be to help them see those three elements in the life of Daniel, and think through how to develop them in their own lives as well.

End 

What's Our Response?

This week help your group decide if they want to live to bring God glory where they work.

If so, encourage them to evaluate their lives. Which of these three areas needs the most work?

1. Their commitment to walk with God, despite cultural pressures?
2. Their relationships with non-believers around them?
3. Excellence in their school work?

Invite them to choose one and resolve to strengthen it.

This series is dedicated to Grunden, Foltz, Schnick, P-Rock, Lehman, Weimer and Zach - seven young studs who endeavor to be Daniels in this generation.

What Are the Questions?

Daniel I

LAUNCH

Imagine your job is to get Osama Bin Laden to issue a proclamation about Jesus Christ to every man woman and child on the face of the earth in which he declares, “I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: ‘What have you done?’ I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything He does is right and all His ways are just. And those who walk in pride He is able to humble.”

How would you do it?

EXPLORE

Daniel is a prophetic book about four believers who lived out their faith in some extremely difficult situations. It’s important to understand the context in which they lived.

Read [2 Chronicles 36:5-21](#).

1. Why did God cast His people into captivity?
2. How did the surrounding nations probably interpret Judah’s demise?
3. What do you think this would do to the reputation of God?
4. What is God’s reputation on your campus?
5. What then would you expect to be the main goal of a faithful believer during this time?

Read [vv. 1-16](#).

6. Why, of all things, would eating the food from the king’s table be unacceptable to them?
7. What is more important to them than obedience to the king?
8. What things have you been asked to do that you’ve had to refuse in order to walk with God?

9. How does Daniel approach his superiors once he has resolved not to defile himself with the king’s food?
10. How would others characterize your demeanor toward the people around you?
11. What pledge does the foursome make in an effort to be excused from eating the king’s food?

Read [vv. 1:17-21](#).

12. At the end of the three years of training, they were found to be “ten times better than all the rest.” What did that require?
13. What do you think motivated their behavior?
14. If their goal really was to declare the glory of God, why do you think there is no indication that Daniel or his friends spoke about Him during this training time?
15. What are the three pillars in the lives of Daniel and his friends on which their ministry will be built?
16. A significant predictor of work ethic in the market-place is work ethic in school. How much effort are you putting into your class work? What does this communicate to those around you?

APPLY

17. What should the focus of your life be?
18. Could you make a pledge similar to the one Daniel made in [vv. 12-13](#)?
19. Of the three pillars (walking with God, building relationships, pursuing excellence) which needs the most work in your life right now?

What Are the Answers?

1. As judgment for their sin, idolatry, and rebellion.
2. They likely observed that the God of Judah was weak and unable to defend against the gods of Babylon.
3. It would appear to diminish His glory.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Believers, who should be jealous for His glory, would want to show the truth of His majesty and power.
6. The food would have been offered to pagan idols; thus, to eat it was to participate in idolatry.
7. Faithfulness to God.
8. Allow the group to discuss.
9. He is polite and tactful.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. We'll be better than the rest.
12. Diligence, hard work, study, sacrifice.
13. They were preparing for ministry, and earning a position of influence, where they could bring glory to God.
14. It was time to prepare, and lay the foundation.
15. Walking with God, developing relationships, pursuing excellence.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. We are to declare the praises of God throughout the earth. See 1 Peter 2:9.
- 18.-19. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

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.

Daniel 1:8