



Sunday School Lesson
Daniel 1:1-21
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Faith and the Influence of Culture



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Quick Links to the Study

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>I. Context</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. Historical</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Literary</p> | <p>II. Message</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a. Captivity, vv. 1-7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">b. Daniel's Commitment, vv. 8-16</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">c. God's Blessings, vv. 17-21</p> |
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Beginning with this study in the Smyth-Helwys Formations series we enter into a four lesson study of the life of Daniel who lived during the Babylonian Exile toward the close of the Old Testament era. The person Daniel has stood as a heroic model for both Jews and Christians for many centuries. His life is about coping with being true to one's heritage while living in an alien and hostile culture. The Book of Daniel has its own unique heritage in interpretative history both inside Judaism and Christianity. The issues surrounding the document are very distinct from the study of the person Daniel. In this first lesson we will give more attention to the background issues related to the book in the Old Testament by the name of Daniel. Subsequent lessons will then build on that foundation for the contextual concerns regarding each study.

One note of importance: because of the interpretative linkage in Christian history of Daniel with prophecy, the internet is loaded to the gills with some of the most bizarre treatments of Daniel imaginable. A simple [Google search](#) under "Book of Daniel" yielded some 8,190,000 hits. Just a quick scanning of a few of the initial pages of listings, which in Google are considered to be the most important hits, uncovers just how differently and diversely the book of Daniel has been treated in Christian interpretative history. The book has been a particularly fertile ground for fringe Christian cultic assertion, even down to one fruitcake who claimed to be a reincarnation of Daniel himself. Such is not the case, however, in the Jewish interpretative history of this book. Jews have had better sense about approaching this scripture document, than has been the much too frequent case among Christian interpreters.

I. Context

The issue of setting for this study takes on more than the usual importance because of some of the knotty issues involved in making sense out of the scripture text itself. Thus, we'll give some careful attention to both the historical and literary background of chapter one of Daniel.

a. Historical

When one begins to probe the compositional history of the book of Daniel (i.e., the external history), immediately some tough issues arise because of the lack of concrete in-



formation. In the history of the copying of the text of Daniel, some parts of the book seem to go back to Aramaic sources, while most of the document can be traced back to Hebrew beginnings. For a helpful summary see George A.F. Knight, "Daniel," *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (iPreach):

A large section of the book (2:4b-7:28) has come down to us, not in Hebrew, but in a related Semitic language, Aramaic (see "The Languages of the Bible," pp. 1194-1200). The exiles learned to speak Aramaic in Babylon; it then became the people's tongue in the postexilic period, continuing through NT times, while Hebrew was used only in worship and as a literary and scholarly language. The Aramaic section begins within one of the stories and goes through the first vision; it appears to be unrelated to any structural distinction. A number of theories have been put forward to explain the change — some on the assumption that the author composed the material in 2 languages, others on the assumption that one of the languages is a translation. A combination theory conjectures that the author composed the stories and first vision in Aramaic for popular reading but used Hebrew for the remaining visions to appeal to the more learned, and that later someone started to translate the Aramaic into Hebrew but got only as far as 2:4a. None of these proposed explanations is completely satisfactory.

Another equally challenging issue is the difference between the Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox version of Daniel and the Protestant version of Daniel. The introduction to the Book of Daniel in the online [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) illustrates this diversity of viewpoint:

In the Hebrew Bible, and in most recent Protestant versions, the Book of Daniel is limited to its proto-canonical portions. In the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and many other ancient and modern translations of the Bible, it comprises both its proto- and its deutero-canonical parts, both of which have an equal right to be considered as inspired, and to be included in a treatment of the Book of Daniel. As in the Vulgate nearly all the deutero-canonical portions of that prophetic writing form a kind of appendix to its proto-canonical contents in the Hebrew text. This article will deal first with the Book of Daniel as it is found in the Hebrew Bible, and next, with its deutero-canonical portions.

The content of the document in the Protestant version is based on the Hebrew/Aramaic text tradition, while the Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodox version comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew text called the [Septuagint](#) (LXX), which was made about 175 B.C.E. The Greek text tradition added significant elements to the earlier Hebrew text tradition. These are usually referred to as "Additions to the Book of Daniel" in most Old Testament translations of the [Apocrypha](#).

For our study, in this series on the book of Daniel, both the Hebrew and the Greek text traditions are the same. Thus, this issue doesn't become as crucial, as it would further into the book of Daniel.

In exploring the questions of (a) who wrote the document, (b) when was it written, (c) where was it written, (d) to whom was it written, (e) why was it written (that is, the compositional history questions), one must first decide whether the document was written (1) at the same time by a single individual or group, or whether (2) different parts of it were written at different times by different individuals. Here an interesting evaluation surfaces, most evangelical and Roman Catholic scholars will opt for the first view, while the rest of Protestant scholarship and most of Jewish scholarship opts for the second view. One's conclusion here is going to radically impact the answer to the above questions regarding composition. These two viewpoints are illustrated in summary fashion below:

(2) Different writers at different times ([Wikipedia article](#)):

The book of Daniel, revolving around the Jewish prophet Daniel, is a book of the Tanakh, in the section known as the *Ketuvim* (Hagiographa), the Christian Old Testament. While Christians consider Daniel a prophet, his book is not included by the Jews in the section of the prophets, the *Nebiim*. The book has arisen from two separate sources, edited in the 3rd century B.C. and augmented in the 2nd century B.C. (see "Date" below), and now consists of two distinct parts, a series of narratives and three apocalyptic prophecies.

(1) A single writer at a one period of time ([Catholic Encyclopedia](#)):

Once it is admitted that the Book of Daniel is the work of one single author, there naturally arises the important question: Is this sole writer the Prophet Daniel who composed the work during the Exile (586-536 B.C.), or, on the contrary, some author, now unknown, who wrote this inspired book at a later date, which can still be made out? The traditional view, in vigour chiefly among Catholics, is to the effect that the whole work, as found in the Hebrew Bible, should be directly referred to Daniel, whose name it bears. It admits, indeed, that numerous alterations have been introduced into the primitive text of the book in the course of ages. It maintains, nevertheless, that both the narratives (chaps. i-vi) wherein Daniel seems to be described by some one else as acting as recorded, and the symbolic visions (chaps. vii-xiii) wherein he describes himself as favoured with heavenly revelations, were written, not simply by an author who was contemporary with that prophet and lived in Babylon in the

sixth century B.C., but by Daniel himself. Such difference in the use of persons is regarded as arising naturally from the respective contents of the two parts of the book: Daniel employed the third person in recording events, for the event is its own witness; and the first person in relating prophetic visions, for such communications from above need the personal attestation of those to whom they are imparted.

Although the latter view has certain traditional appeal, a careful examination of the contents of Daniel reveal issues and perspectives that make a compelling case for some version of the writing of this document at different times and by different people. The [Wikipedia article on Daniel](#) provides one helpful summation of these issues.

Rabbi Emanuel Hirsch, writing in the online [Jewish Encyclopedia](#), provides this assessment of the compositional history of the document:

Stories undoubtedly existed of a person by the name of Daniel, who was known to Ezekiel as a wise man. Tradition then ascribed to this wise man all the traits which Israel could attribute to its heroes. He was exalted as the pattern of piety and faithfulness; and it may also have been said that he interpreted dreams, read cryptograms, and foreshadowed the beginning of the Messianic kingdom. In any case his name may have played the same role in literature as that of Solomon or that of Enoch; and as one author ascribed his book, "Koheleth," to Solomon, so another author may have made Daniel responsible for his. As to the origin of his prophecies, it would probably be unjust to say that they were inventions. They may have been suggested by the author's enthusiastic study of the past history of God's people. He utilized the past to unlock the future. This is evident from ix. 2, where the author says that he had paid attention to the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning the seventy years, which prophecy became the basis for a new prophecy. This shows that the author was merely a disciple of the Prophets, one who reproduced the prophecies of his masters. His book, indeed, is not included in the section Nebim.

Regarding the internal history concerns of chapter one, the setting for this introductory narrative will be treated in the [study of the text of chapter one](#).

b. Literary

The literary context for chapter one is helpfully summarized in the article on Daniel in the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#):

The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person (chaps. i-vi), and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person (chaps. vii-xii). The opening chapter of the first series may be considered as a preface to the whole work. It introduces to the reader the Hebrew heroes of the book, Daniel and his three fellow-captives, Ananias, Misael, and Azarias, and records the manner in which these noble youths obtained a high rank in Nebuchadnezzar's service, although they had refused to be defiled by eating of the royal food.

Thus chapter one stands as an important introduction to the rest of the document.

II. Message

The internal structure of chapter one can be divided into three segments: (1) vv. 1-7, Captivity; (2) vv. 8-16, Daniel's Commitment; (3) vv. 17-21, God's Blessings.

a. Captivity, vv. 1-7

NASB

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of

NRSV

1 In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar, and placed

NLT

1 During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah,^{F1} King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it with his armies. 2 The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, he took with him some of the sacred objects

his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of wisdom*, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. 6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abednego.



Nebuchadnezzar's Palace

the vessels in the treasury of his gods. 3 Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court. 6 Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. 7 The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

from the Temple of God and placed them in the treasure-house of his god in the land of Babylonia.^{F2} 3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, who was in charge of the palace officials, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. 4 "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good sense, and have the poise needed to serve in the royal palace. Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians."^{F3} 5 The king assigned them a daily ration of the best food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for a three-year period, and then some of them would be made his advisers in the royal court. 6 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. 7 The chief official renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.

Footnotes:

F1: The third year of Jehoiakim's reign, according to the Hebrew system of reckoning, was 605 B.C.

F2: Hebrew *the land of Shinar*.

F3: Or *of the Chaldeans*.

Notes:

As is reflected in footnote one of the New Living Translation above, the time of this invasion of the Babylonians of the southern kingdom was 605 B.C.E. To place this in context, see the Chronological Table on the following page. The [Babylonians](#) were the dominate empire of the eastern Mediterranean world at this moment of time. Although they could be cruel to captured peoples, their history is much more tolerate than that of the Assyrians, who preceded them. [Nebuchadnezzar](#) was one of the better known and more powerful rulers of the Babylonian empire. During his reign he controlled most all the [Fertile Crescent](#) from Babylon, his capital.

George A. F. Knight, "The Book of Daniel," *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, (iP-reach) has a helpful summary:

1:1-2. Beginning of the Exile.

The record in 2 Kings 23:34-24:17, confirmed and supplemented by Babylonian annals, shows that Jehoiakim became king of Judah as a vassal of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt in 609. In 605 Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco at Carchemish (cf. Jer. 46:2), then hurried home to succeed his father as king of Babylon. Thereafter he proceeded to take over from Egypt the domination of Syria and Palestine, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for 3 years (2 Kings 24:1) before rebelling ca. 600. Being occupied elsewhere, Nebuchadnezzar did not bring his own army against Jerusalem till 598. At that time Jehoiakim died, and after 3 months his young son Jehoiachin surrendered on Mar. 16, 597. A Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in Jehoiakim's third year, i.e. before Carchemish, can scarcely be fitted into this record. No doubt the author misinterpreted the 3 years of Jehoiakim's vassalage. On the other hand 2 Chr. 36:5-7, if historical—for the Chronicler was also more interested in theology than in precise history—may indicate that the establishment of Babylonian control over Judah after Carchemish involved some military action, which may have resulted in the taking of a few hostages to Babylon. More probably, however, the tradition folio, wed by the author refers to the first body of exiles deported with Jehoiachin in 597.

B.C.E.	EGYPT	PALESTINE	MESOPOTAMIA
		THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE	
		BABYLONIA	
	Apries (Hophra), 589–570	Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), 3 mos., 598–597 First Deportation to Babylonia, 597 Zedekiah (Mattaniah), 597–587 FALL OF JERUSALEM SECOND DEPORTATION, 587 BABYLONIAN EXILE Ezekiel, c. 593–573	Nebuchadnezzar, 605–562
600 to 500		(Second Isaiah, c. 540) Edict of Cyrus, 538	Nabonidus, 556–539 (his son: Belshazzar) RISE OF PERSIA Cyrus II, 550–530 Defeat of Media, c. 550 Invasion of Lydia, c. 546 FALL OF BABYLON, 539
		THE EMPIRE OF PERSIA	
	Conquest by Persia 525	THE RESTORATION JUDAH	
		Return of exiles Rebuilding of Temple, 520–515 (Haggai) (Zechariah)	Cambyses, 530–522 Darius I, 522–486
500 to 400	Egypt under Persian rule, 525–401	(Malachi, c. 500–450) Ezra's mission, 458 (?) Nehemiah arrives, 445 Ezra's mission, c. 428 (?)	Persia Xerxes I (Ahasuerus), 486–465 Artaxerxes I (Longimanus), 465–424 Xerxes II, 423 Darius II, 423–404
		Ezra's mission, c. 398(?)	Artaxerxes II (Mnemon), 404–358 Artaxerxes III, 358–338 Arses, 338–336 Darius III, 336–331

Nebuchadnezzar represents the Babylonian name Nabu-kudurri-usur, "Nabu [i.e. the god Nebo (cf. Isa. 46:1)] has protected the succession rights." The form Nebuchadnezzar found in Jer. and Ezek. is thus slightly closer to the original. Shinar, an old name for S Mesopotamia, gives a touch of antiquity as an allusion to the tower of Babel (cf. Gen. 11:2), where man's pride and egotism met with God's judgment.

1:3-5. The Wisdom of Babylon. The first deportation in 597 took most of Jerusalem's "intelligentsia." Here it is related that some of the younger of these were chosen for higher education in the rich lore of Babylonia. The selection is obviously a great honor for foreigners and demands that the young men be physically and mentally superior. The Chaldeans were a Babylonian tribe that in the 7th cent. became dominant in overthrowing the Assyrian Empire and establishing the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In writings before and during the Exile the name is practically synonymous with "Babylonians" (cf. e.g. 2 Kings 25:4; Isa. 13:19; 43:14; Jer. 21:4; Ezek. 1:3). In this book it has a meaning acquired later (see Intro.), describing the priestly caste, the intellectual elite of Babylon, who studied and taught the astrology, mathematics, and magic for which the city was famous (cf. Isa. 47:9, 12). To stand before the king was to be available to give him advice on demand.

1:6-7. The Names of the Young Men. The Hebrew names of all 4 youths contain syllables meaning God (el) or Yahweh (iah). But the chief of the royal household gives them Babylonian names. In the ancient world a man's name was meaningful. If he entered into a new relationship he might receive a new name (cf. e.g. 2 Kings 23:34). Belteshazzar is understood by the author to contain the name of the Babylonian god Bel (4:8), but probably it represents a Babylonian name meaning rather "protect his life." Abednego is no doubt a corruption of "servant of Nebo" (cf. Isa. 46:1), but the tradition has so far altered Shadrach and Meshach that their meanings cannot be determined.

The connecting of these verses to today's world suggests several things. In our recent American history, we haven't been subjected to the chaos of war and defeat. Thus, it's hard for most of us to comprehend just how devastating the destruction of one's homeland could be. For some who have fought in military combat in other parts of the world, there is a better realization of what that is like. Additionally, the idea of being taken captive to a foreign land is hard for most of us to grasp. How does one cope when suddenly thrust into an environment where everyone speaks a different language, wears different clothes, eats different foods etc.? At the least, such an experience would be an acid test of our values and commitments, especially religiously.

The point of these seven verses is that these four young men handled this situation wonderfully. They made the best of their circumstances of living in Babylonia as captive Jews. As such they become a challenge to us when we face significant change of circumstance in our life. Hopefully, we can handle change as well as they did.

b. Daniel's Commitment, vv. 8-16

NASB

8 But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, 10 and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king." 11 But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see." 14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who

NRSV

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. 9 Now God allowed Daniel to receive favor and compassion from the palace master. 10 The palace master said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 12 "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe." 14 So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. 16 So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

NLT

8 But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief official for permission to eat other things instead. 9 Now God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel. 10 But he was alarmed by Daniel's suggestion. "My lord the king has ordered that you eat this food and wine," he said. "If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded for neglecting my duties." 11 Daniel talked it over with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief official to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 12 "Test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said. 13 "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's rich food. Then you can decide whether or not to let us continue eating our diet." 14 So the attendant agreed to Daniel's suggestion and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. 16 So after that, the attendant fed them

had been eating the king's choice food. 16 So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

only vegetables instead of the rich foods and wines.

Notes:

This segment focuses on Daniel especially, but as representative and as spokesman for all four young men. Once again George Knight in the *Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* has a helpful summation:

1:8-16. A Test of the Food Laws. Between the days of the Exile and the 2nd cent. B.C. the Jews had become increasingly impressed with the importance of keeping in detail the ordinances of the Mosaic law. Notable among them were the regulations about "clean" and "unclean" meats (Lev. 11:1; Deut. 14:3-21). Their observance became a mark not only of obedience to the law but also of separation from the Gentiles. Antiochus Epiphanes' program of forced hellenization seems to have included attempts to require abandonment of this source of difference (cf. I Macc. 1:62-63; II Macc. 6:18; 7:1). In this story Dan. challenges the royal officer to prove by a test that the will of God revealed in the food laws will effect more practical good than the rich food prepared in violation of them. Rather than eat "unclean" meats, he and his companions will restrict themselves to vegetables, none of which are forbidden in the food laws. Ten days is too short a time for any natural effects of a difference in diet; the noticeably healthier appearance of the 4 youths must be attributed to divine approval of their loyalty. This story must have bolstered the resolve of readers who faced hardship and even persecution in their adherence to Jewish customs.

One of the traditions that set the Jewish people apart from their ancient neighbors was the dietary code in the Law of Moses, as defined in [Leviticus 11](#) and also in [Deut. 14:3-21](#) (NRSV):

2 You have been set apart as holy to the LORD your God, and he has chosen you to be his own special treasure from all the nations of the earth. 3 "You must not eat animals that are ceremonially unclean. 4 These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, 5 the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep. 6 "Any animal that has split hooves and chews the cud may be eaten, 7 but if the animal doesn't have both, it may not be eaten. So you may not eat the camel, the hare, or the rock badger. They chew the cud but do not have split hooves. 8 And the pig may not be eaten, for though it has split hooves, it does not chew the cud. All these animals are ceremonially unclean for you. You may not eat or even touch the dead bodies of such animals. 9 "As for marine animals, you may eat whatever has both fins and scales. 10 You may not, however, eat marine animals that do not have both fins and scales. They are ceremonially unclean for you. 11 "You may eat any bird that is ceremonially clean. 12 These are the birds you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey, 13 the buzzard, kites of all kinds, 14 ravens of all kinds, 15 the ostrich, the nighthawk, the seagull, hawks of all kinds, 16 the little owl, the great owl, the white owl, 17 the pelican, the carrion vulture, the cormorant, 18 the stork, herons of all kinds, the hoopoe, and the bat. 19 "All flying insects are ceremonially unclean for you and may not be eaten. 20 But you may eat any winged creature that is ceremonially clean. 21 "Do not eat anything that has died a natural death. You may give it to a foreigner living among you, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But do not eat it yourselves, for you are set apart as holy to the LORD your God." "Do not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

As a part of the Holiness Code, which defined patterns of behavior for all the covenant people, these regulations about eating were linked to obedience to God in covenant. Although some of them may have had physical health benefits, that played no role in their being set up and in being followed, as would sometimes be the case today among [Jewish](#) and Christian groups that still seek to follow this code.

The question emerges regarding the relevancy of those food regulations to Christians. Generally, [Mark 7:19b](#) as a part of vv. 1-23 is considered to be the definitive Christian response: "Thus he [Jesus] declared all foods clean." Additionally, Paul in [Colossians 2:16](#) strongly disconnects any association of eating patterns with spiritual growth or maturity (NRSV): "16 Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths." Professing Christians at Colossae were being pressured to adopt the Jewish dietary code, but Paul's response was to reject this completely.

The more important truth from these verses for us today is the courageous example of Daniel standing up for his religious heritage even at great personal risk. He was deeply committed to the principles of serving God as a covenant Jew and also trusted God to honor that commitment. Herein lies the challenge to us. Temptation to compromise our religious commitment, especially in the supposedly fringe elements, is daily, and sometimes very powerful. Daniel's example encourages us to be faithful and resist watering

down our faith.

c. God's Blessings, vv. 17-21

NASB

17 As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every *branch of literature and wisdom*; Daniel even understood all *kinds of visions and dreams*. 18 Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service. 20 As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and conjurers who were* in all his realm. 21 And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

NRSV

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time that the king had set for them to be brought in, the palace master brought them into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, 19 and the king spoke with them. And among them all, no one was found to compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they were stationed in the king's court. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. 21 And Daniel continued there until the first year of King Cyrus.

NLT

17 God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for learning the literature and science of the time. And God gave Daniel special ability in understanding the meanings of visions and dreams. 18 When the three-year training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief official brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with each of them, and none of them impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they were appointed to his regular staff of advisers. 20 In all matters requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, the king found the advice of these young men to be ten times better than that of all the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom. 21 Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus's reign.^{F4}

Footnotes:

F4: The first year of Cyrus's reign was 538 B.C.

Notes:

Once more we turn to the helpful comments of George Knight in the Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible:

1:17-21. The Young Men's Reward. Because of their obedience to the food laws under difficult circumstances God blesses Dan. and his companions with superior development not only physically but mentally, so that they become ten times better than the pagan wise men. Even so, if Israel remains loyal to God, there can be no end to his blessings. The first year of King Cyrus (vs. 21) marked the end of the Exile and the call to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). Thus Dan.'s career is noted as spanning the whole period of the Exile. The reference is apparently to the length of his service in public office rather than of his lifetime (cf. 6:28; 10:1). Some have thought this vs. to be displaced, but at this point it serves as a reminder that God's judgment in the Exile was temporary and thus virtually was a promise to the suffering patriots in 165 B.C. that the days of their trial are numbered.

The heroic nature of this initial story in Daniel underscores the positive outcome of God's blessings upon these young Jewish boys who honored their God and were consistent to their spiritual heritage. Although divine blessing can and will take different directions according to the situation and God's will, the principle still holds: God will bless those who are faithful to him.

The central lesson of chapter one is that our culture may at times be crossways with our religious commitment, but when we put God first His blessings will come. As Jesus put it in [Matt. 6:33](#), "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." We would do well to heed these admonitions from Daniel and from our Lord.