



**WEEK OF JUNE 2, 2024**

**LESSON AIM:** **Resolve to have a heart that trusts the Lord for knowledge and understanding.**

**UNIT:** Daniel

**THEME:** Revealer of Mysteries

**LESSON TEXT:** Daniel 1:1-21

**SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT:** Proverbs 2:1-11; 3:5-8; Psalm 24:1-5;  
Colossians 1:9-10

## KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

BY MARK SCOTT

Would it be good to learn detective work from Barney Fife? Would it be good to take dancing lessons from Pee Wee Herman? Would it be wise to learn dentistry from Tim Conway? Knowledge is only as good as its source.

The major prophet Daniel had the challenging task of balancing (or holding in tension) the knowledge he received from Almighty God and the knowledge he acquired from living in captivity. Daniel lived most of his life working for Babylonia and Medo-Persia, two superpowers. His godly convictions remained above reproach, even as he worked in pagan government positions. Daniel was squeaky clean. There was no dirt on Daniel, though he claimed to have sin (Daniel 9:5-6).

**Knowledge Forfeited**

*Daniel 1:1-2*

The book of Daniel's prophecy began with a historical reference. Josiah was the last good king of Judah. But his sons did not follow in the path of their father. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and Gedaliah were all disappointments and ultimately caved in to King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 23–25). The king of Babylon began besieging Jerusalem during Jehoiakim's *third year*. Nebuchadnezzar starved the great city and burned the temple.

The southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) had not learned the lessons of faithfulness to Yahweh from the ten northern tribes. (Idolatry became the nemesis.) God used wicked governments like Babylon (cf. Habakkuk) to discipline his people and preserve a remnant for the sending of the Messiah. The *articles from the temple of God* were hauled away to Babylon and placed in the *house of Nebuchadnezzar's god*, which was a common practice in the ancient world to show which God was seemingly more powerful. The knowledge of God was forfeited by disobedience (cf. Amos 8:11).

**Knowledge Immersion**

*Daniel 1:3-7*

"Immersion experience" is one way to learn a foreign language in a different culture. A person is baptized into a whole new world and forced to learn to survive. That is what happened to Daniel and his three friends. Nebuchadnezzar was vicious, but he was not dumb. He picked the cream of the crop of the exiles to serve him. *Ashpenaz* led this baptismal indoctrination.

Daniel and his friends probably had royal blood in their veins. They had no *physical defect* (blemish or spot) and

were *handsome*. In addition to that, they were wicked smart. Four cognitive descriptions underlined their brilliance: *aptitude, learning, well informed, and quick to understand*. This immersion experience did not just include *language and literature* but also *diet—i.e., food and wine from the king's table*. This crash course at "Babylonia University" was to last three years, and then they were to *enter the king's service*. The ultimate challenge to the young men's identities was being given names that centered on false Babylonian gods. The goal was to rid these Yahweh worshippers of anything that smacked of Hebrew.

**Knowledge Tested**

*Daniel 1:8-16*

"You can take the boy out of Israel, but you cannot take Israel out of the boy." Daniel was willing to learn truth from anywhere since, as Arthur Holmes wrote, *All Truth Is God's Truth*. But he was unwilling to compromise his religious convictions. Sometimes a person just has to say no (thank you, Nancy Reagan). Daniel *resolved not to defile himself*. This phrase means that Daniel "set his heart not to pollute" himself *with the royal food and wine*.

What was so defiling about the king's food and wine? Was it not kosher according to the Levitical dietary code? Had it been prayed over to the idol gods and therefore desecrated? Did it just not taste good? The text does not say why Daniel chose this path. It could be for any number of reasons, but Daniel proposed a 10-day test. Vegetables in place of the king's food for 10 days.

Ten days would hardly be enough time for such a test to produce proof. The number 10 might be symbolic for a "full amount" of time. Or God's work for Daniel and his three friends may have been miraculous. Regardless, the test of Daniel's knowledge over the king's table was successful. In fact, the test was so successful that it won over the *court official, Ashpenaz*.

**Knowledge Affirmed**

*Daniel 1:17-21*

God was at work through the vegetable test and through his providence. God *gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning* to Daniel and his three friends. This surely included the Hebrew Scriptures but was not limited to them. (The king was super impressed with these young Hebrew boys.) Daniel would face trials over the next 70 years, but he would remain in royal service even into the beginning of the Persian rule of *King Cyrus*. ■

## APPLICATION

### DANIEL'S GRADUATION SPEECH

BY DAVID FAUST

Every May and June, high school and college students don caps and gowns, and relatives and friends gather at commencement ceremonies to watch them receive their diplomas. Celebrities or members of the graduating class deliver speeches. Occasionally, a commencement speech makes headlines because the speaker said something especially quotable or controversial.

Imagine if a Bible character could address the graduates. Would Joshua conclude by saying something like this? "You must choose your priorities in life. As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord!" Would Solomon pass along some pithy proverbs? I imagine the graduates nodding when he said, "Much study wears the body," but would they agree with his conclusion that they should "fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:12-13)?

How would a commencement crowd respond to a passionate message from a pull-no-punches prophet like Amos or Jeremiah? How would they react to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount or the speech Paul delivered to the philosophers in Athens?

#### What Daniel Might Say

If he were around today, the prophet Daniel would be a natural choice for a graduation speaker. According to Daniel 1, he was intelligent and good looking, filled with leadership potential. Here are some points I think Daniel might have emphasized in a speech to young adults.

*"Serve the Lord wherever you go."* After being yanked away from his home in Judah into Babylonian captivity, Daniel was selected to participate in an elite three-year training program established by the king (Daniel 1:1-5). However, he didn't leave his convictions behind. When Daniel found himself in stressful situations far from home, he remembered the faith of his fathers.

*"Choose your friends wisely."* Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (v. 6) shared Daniel's worldview and later they

faced their own intense test of faith. I imagine these four friends formed an accountability group and encouraged each other to uphold their convictions.

*"Remember who you are and whose you are."* A government administrator assigned Daniel and his friends new Babylonian names (v. 7), but this band of brothers never forgot their Hebrew roots. The Lord, not the prevailing culture, determined their true identity.

*"Take care of your body and mind."* Daniel and his friends didn't fall into the trap of alcohol abuse and care-less overeating. Rejecting the king's fancy food (and its menu items prohibited by the Law of Moses), they consumed a simple vegetarian diet and were healthier than their peers (vv. 8-16).

*"Learn all you can, but don't forget the Lord."* Daniel's education exposed him to "all kinds of literature and learning" (v. 17), but along with his other studies, he devoted his heart, soul, mind, and strength (including his intellectual prowess) to loving God.

*"Use the gifts God has given you."* Daniel possessed a rare God-given ability to "understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (v. 17). That's not my gift and it's probably not yours, but the Lord has given all of us gifts we can use to serve him and to bless others.

*"Stand up for what you believe."* Daniel's career blossomed and in time he rose to a top government position, but he never compromised his convictions. His faith even withstood the lion's den of persecution.

Daniel would be an inspiring commencement speaker, but since he isn't around today, I hope others will get his message across. Young adults (and older ones, too) still need to hear it.

**Personal Challenge:** Write a note of encouragement to someone who is graduating from high school or college. ■

## DISCOVERY

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Talk about a time when you stood up for your faith in a hostile environment. What happened?

Ask two people to read aloud **Daniel 1:1-21**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. The book of Daniel begins with the besiege of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Lesson writer Mark Scott observes, "God used wicked governments like Babylon to discipline his people and preserve a remnant for the sending of the Messiah." Have you ever experienced God's love through his discipline? Explain.
3. Nebuchadnezzar had his officials choose a select group of young Jewish captives to be indoctrinated into Babylonian culture and teaching before entering the king's service. Daniel and his friends were a part of that group. Why do you think the king did this, and what challenges do you think this represented to Daniel and his friends?
4. Why do you think Daniel "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine" (v. 8)? What was at risk?
  - What resolutions have you made to maintain your purity and obedience in the present culture?
5. When Daniel's first request was dismissed (vv. 8-10), he went to a second official who granted his request (vv. 11-14). What does this say about Daniel's commitment and persistence?
  - How does the trait of persistence help us today in our Christian faith?
6. At the end of Daniel's proposed test (vv. 12-14), he and his friends "looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food" (v. 15). What part do you think God played in this and what does it teach us about God's faithfulness today?
7. In a hostile and pagan environment, Daniel and his friends excelled beyond all their contemporaries in wisdom and understanding (vv. 18-20). How can you seek God's wisdom today to serve him in a culture that largely ignores him?
8. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

**For Next Week:** Read and reflect on **Daniel 2:1-3, 17-23, 26-30, 47-49**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■