

Church and Theology

Where the Bible and the Local Church Meet

Studies in the Book of Daniel¹

#2—God Blesses Spiritual Resolve

Daniel 1:3-21

Paul S. Karleen

In 2 Tim. 4:10 we have one of the saddest statements in all the Bible—"Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica." Earlier, during Paul's first imprisonment, he is mentioned as "a fellow worker." But after deserting Paul, he never appears in the biblical record. Demas dropped out.

We also see Mark in Acts 15, who left Paul and Barnabas during the first missionary journey but was, thankfully, later restored and eventually wrote the third Gospel. Mark wavered.

³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

Yet on the other hand we see in Scripture people such as Joseph and Paul, who were steadfast in their dedication to serving God. Crucial points arrive in everyone's life where we have to make tough decisions for God's way. Are you ready for these times? We've all heard the saying "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Let's modify that slightly and say "When the going gets tough, the tough take a stand."

Spiritual resolve can be connected with different issues. One is moral, and so we have Joseph, who refused the advances of Potiphar's wife. When the point of testing came for him, there was no question of what he would do.

Or the testing of our spiritual resolve might be in the realm of truth, where we take a stand against what is unbiblical. We could mention the martyrs of the early Church and those down through the centuries. Although not a martyr, John Wycliffe paved the way for later reformers in the 14th century, criticizing the Roman Catholic Church, and influenced the Czech Jan Hus, who was martyred in 1415. (We had the privilege of having one of Hus's descendants—a young woman—fellowship with our local church many years ago.) We should also think of Martin Luther and his decisive stand against the Catholic Church and the many Reformers who followed in the sixteenth century. I can think of many people in recent years whom I know personally who have been ridiculed, even pushed aside and losing teaching positions for studying the Scriptures and taking a stand for the Doctrines of Sovereign Grace.

Or spiritual resolve may be physical in nature, or may have a combination of issues, as we will see with Daniel and his companions in our text today.

God will surely bring the trials that test our spiritual resolve, but he also offers opportunities for preparation—may I say, even through this study. Compare yourself with these young Jewish men as we see them exercising spiritual fortitude and ask yourself how well you are doing. And may I add that, if you are a young Christian

¹ Copyright 2023 by Paul S. Karleen. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](http://www.bible.com)® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

or a Christian who is young, this is doubly important, because you have opportunity to formulate spiritual resolutions that can last a lifetime.

1. God sovereignly brings tests for spiritual resolve into the lives of Christians

The controlling hand of God is amazingly clear in this passage. Remember that it was God who put Judah under Nebuchadnezzar's control, which included what happened to Daniel and his friends. Here is the text:

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 delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

⁶ Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

⁸ 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. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

a. Name changes

Why did Nebuchadnezzar set up training for the four? Undoubtedly it was to make them forget God and his ways. So, he changed their names so they'd be more absorbed into Babylonian culture and perhaps be used by Babylon to control other Jews. Each Hebrew name contains a reference to God, which is removed. The mention of these names indicates would suggest that they had godly parents who gave them names with spiritual significance. Here are the names and the changes—the meanings of which are debated day:

<u>Hebrew name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Babylonian name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Daniel	God is my judge	Belteshazzar	May Bel protect his life
Hananiah	Yah(weh) is gracious	Shadrach	Command of Aku
Mishael	Who is what God is?	Meshach	Shadow of the prince?
Azariah	Yah(weh) helps	Abednego	Servant of Nego? or Servant of the shining one?

All of the new names appear to be connected with Babylonian gods, and the names of the God of Israel are removed. Their allegiance should now be to the gods of Babylon.

b. Changes in habits

Undoubtedly the food in their new diet had been sacrificed to pagan gods and idols. As such, it would be unclean for an Israelite to eat, and the youths would be dishonoring God if they ate it. Similarly with the fact that it was prepared by Gentiles. Daniel's response indicates that they were refusing to vary from what they had been taught as to being under the Law.

c. Discouraging circumstances

Remember in all of this that the young men were in captivity, away from home and, humanly speaking, without hope of returning to Jerusalem. They were surrounded by the splendor of the city of Babylon (some 60 miles south of today's Baghdad), with its great wall extending over 50 miles in circumference. It was known for its hanging gardens, its canals and its idolatry. It was undoubtedly the most impressive city of its time, with perhaps up to 100,000 inhabitants, but it was corrupt and evil, so much so that the New Testament presents it in the Book of Revelation as a revived, immoral, economic and spiritual counterpart to the New Jerusalem, which replaces it. See the reproductions of Babylon at the end of this study.

In the midst of this—the spiritual and physical corruption—the young men had to make a decision. Their stand is splendid and amazing in light of all of this. These four had to swim upstream as God brought these circumstances into their lives.

2. God prepares his children for challenges to spiritual resolve

Those pious parents not only gave the young men names to remind them of who their God was, but they must have prayed for them and taught them Scripture. They were princes, so they must have been close to godly King Josiah, who had died a few years before this. Here's a sample of what Josiah did (2 Ki. 23:24-25):

²⁴ Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiyah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD. ²⁵ Neither before

nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

Reigning in Judah for 30 years, Josiah stood against heathen worship and for the law, destroying high places and attacking idolatry.

Christians need to be constantly taking advantage of opportunities to be prepared for spiritual challenges. The Hebrew men in this account had done that—that’s why they could take the stand that they did.

3. God asks us to be able to make the right spiritual decisions when the tests come.

These men made decisions that involved standing against everything that was around them—extreme idolatry, harsh exile, threats from powerful authorities. Their resolution is based on adherence to God’s Word and trust in his faithfulness. Before and during the Babylonian captivity, Daniel’s contemporary Ezekiel ministered to complacent Judeans and warned them of the consequences of disobedience to God. Daniel and his companions stand in stark contrast to the mass of Judeans, who maintained their moral superiority. In connection with this, it is worth noting that no other Judeans are mentioned in the Book of Daniel. These men were apparently members of a small minority who had spiritual resolve.

Observe that Daniel made his decision, leading his friends, without regard for the consequences. He had no way of knowing the outcome or whether he would lose his head for taking a stand. Taking a spiritual and physical stand for purity and holiness according to the Law was the key issue.

The Babylonians brought two new and key features to the lives of the young Hebrews: Babylonian learning and Babylonian food. The men accepted the learning, since they could sort out in their thinking what was true and what was false. The Babylonians were, for example, advanced astronomers, who were able to use a precursor to modern calculus to determine planetary orbits. Daniel and company would be able to study this and then certainly assign the associated regularity of heavenly bodies with the power of God (they must have known what Job said about God’s sovereignty over the physical universe). And the same with other Babylonian studies. But not with things such as food sacrificed to idols. They knew where to draw the line between observations of the universe and things that violated God’s will. This was because they saw life through the filter of God’s Word. A Christian today, faced with the observations and ideas of the unsaved world, is responsible to do that same filtering and make sure that beliefs and decisions are made on the basis of Scripture. Daniel and his companions took the learning, but not the lifestyle.

The text shows that Daniel had the courage to say “No”: “But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine...” (v. 8). Because of the circumstances, this was a life-or-death position to take, because the official supervising the men could lose his head if the men became unhealthy. There would certainly have been similar repercussions for Daniel and friends. Daniel could not know what the outcome of their stand would be, but he did what was right anyway. Doesn’t this remind us of Joseph, who made biblical decisions in a hostile environment?

4. God blesses spiritual resolve

Don’t we hear today of someone trying to sell us a product to use for a week or ten days and then look for miraculous results? Well, in the case of the spiritual resolve of the four Judeans, we really do have a miraculous result. At the end of the ten days, they were “healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.” In addition, God gave them wisdom that was “ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.” By the way, don’t miss the fact that God used a heathen guard to care for the young men through this account. Another piece of the stress on God’s sovereign control in blessing his people.

When we think of the believers down through the ages who are known for their spiritual resolve, we should not think that outcomes such as theirs are unattainable. There are no secrets to the blessings of spiritual resolve: Utilize opportunities to strengthen your stand for what is in Scripture, do not be surprised when God brings the testing and thank God when the outcome is spiritual blessing.

Daniel resolved; Joseph refused; in his resistance against the Roman Catholic Church, Martin Luther said, "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God." Caleb said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." And the psalmist said (Ps. 118:6-8), "The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies." ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans." How is YOUR spiritual resolve?

Questions for further study:

1. Can you think of people in the Bible who did not have spiritual resolve? How about some who did? Do you see any common features for the people in each category?
2. What do we observe from the text about Daniel's interaction with people? How does this compare to his circumstances?
3. Were all the things that happened in your life yesterday part of God's plan? (Remember Eph. 1:11, which tells us that God's plan includes everything.) What does this truth tell us about how we should read this account in Daniel 1? Why did God bring this test for Daniel?
4. What was the exact nature of Daniel's stand? What issues were involved? Can you think of any situations today that would be similar for us?
5. Can you identify opportunities for spiritual preparation that God has brought into your life?
6. Would you be willing to comment on tests of your resolve that God has brought into your life?



Babylon portrayed at its height (above; about four square miles) and its partially reconstructed and unearthed ruins today (below). Population during the time of Daniel may have been as great as 100,000.

