

# Daniel 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us turn now to the chapter we read in the book of Daniel, chapter 1, and we'll take as a connecting link, verse 8.

Daniel, chapter 1, verse 8. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank.

Therefore he requested the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now, I would like this evening to begin with you a study of this great character, Daniel, as he has brought before us in this book.

And I'll try first of all to place Daniel in his historical setting so that we can understand as we go on what this book brings before us.

After the death of Joshua, when Israel had been established in Canaan, their history became one of repeated rebellion against the authority of God and his word.

[ 1 : 45 ] And God warned them repeatedly through the prophets whom he sent to them that unless they turned from the evil of their ways and repented, that he would punish them by leading them into exile.

In the course of time, the kingdom of Israel was split in two after the death of Solomon. And they divided into Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

The spiritual condition of both nations continued to deteriorate until eventually the sword of God's threatening fell upon them both.

The north Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria and the southern kingdom Judah taken into captivity by Babylon.

So, as this book itself tells us in chapter 8, when the fulfillment of many warnings had taken place, when the iniquity of both nations had run its course, the fulfillment of the Lord took place.

[ 3 : 10 ] The indignation of the Lord took place. Now, this indignation or exile lasted 70 years.

And its beginning, as the book of Kings and the book of Chronicles tells us, its beginning was really in three separate stages. When Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt, which before that had plagued Israel, he marched on his conquering way to overthrow Judah.

And eventually he did that in the days of Jehoiakim, as this first verse tells us. Jehoiakim was carried away, captive to Babylon, together with the vessels, or what you might probably call the utensils, the furniture, which was used in the temple in Jerusalem.

And that these vessels, as we read here, placed in the temple of one of the heathen deities of Babylon.

Babylon was an idolatrous nation. Together with the king and the temple vessels, Nebuchadnezzar had a policy by which young men of noble birth, who were physically and intellectually well endowed, were also carried away to Babylon to be trained in, as this chapter tells us, in the Chaldean culture.

[ 5 : 01 ] And eventually placed in strategic places in the administrative government of the land, so that they would be assimilated into the thinking and the practices of Babylon itself.

Now, this plan of Nebuchadnezzar, I suppose, was quite astute in itself. He set up what we would probably call today training colleges, or perhaps even universities, where a period, as this chapter again tells us, where a period of three years was spent, and you know that that is the period that people take normally for an ordinary arts degree, a university degree, perhaps even an HND course in some of our colleges and universities.

And these men had to pass a very strict physical and educational test. They had to be, as I said, physically, and this verse of this chapter tells us that, physically well endowed and intellectually well endowed as well.

While they were in that college, they were very well looked after, as verse 5 tells us. They ate the best food and drank the best wine.

Together with that, they were renamed. Now, this was a practice which was not just common to Babylon, but to many other nations in those far-off days.

[ 6 : 40 ] The custom really was meant to lead these youths to dissociate themselves from the land of their birth and the practices, the religious practices of that land.

The practice was meant to have the effect of obliterating, ultimately, the name of the true gods. And the names that were given to them were always associated with the gods of Babylon.

And it is John Calvin who makes this observation, and I quote, the design was to lead these youths to adopt the customs of the Chaldeans that they might have nothing in common with either the Jewish nation or the living God.

Now, that was a practice. I think that you yourselves may recollect, perhaps some of the young fellows here tonight might be interested in this, you know that even our own day, that there are people who, when they embrace a particular religion, will change their name.

The famous boxer Muhammad Ali changed his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali, because he became a crusading Muslim.

[ 8 : 15 ] And the same principle was here in this day of Nebuchadnezzar, so that these people would be led to renounce their God, their religion, their nation, their practices, and embrace that of the Chaldean nation.

And at the end of this three-year period, these captive youths had the promise of a worthwhile career in Babylon itself.

Now, there's a connection with that training, that Daniel and his three young friends, and it is reckoned that they would have been about the age of 17 or 18 at this time, that Daniel and his three young friends took their stand.

And it was really associated with the dietary laws of Israel. As you know, under the Mosaic law, Jews had to obey a strict code of practice concerning what they ate and what they drank.

There were certain animals which were forbidden them to eat, and certainly the way the animals that they were allowed to eat had to be killed in a certain way, and the blood had to be drained away.

[ 9 : 42 ] It's a connection with that that people say today, that butchers who sell black puddings wouldn't have made much of a living in the Israel or the Judah of those days.

Well, it may have been connected with the kind of meat, and the way in which the meat was slaughtered, and the way in which the meat was presented for eating, that led Daniel and his young friends to take their stand and say, look, this is not in accordance with the religious practices, and we are not going to eat this food, nor are we going to drink this wine.

But perhaps the thing that, and I think the New Testament sheds light for us, and this is certainly in the letter to the Corinthians, maybe the thing that led Daniel and his men to take the stand was this, that the practice in heathen nations was always to dedicate the meal, first of all, to their heathen deities, to their idols.

So what they were eating was, in effect, as far as Daniel was concerned, food offered to idols, and that was tantamount to just participating in sacrificing to idols themselves.

So Daniel and his friends take their stand, and they decide that they are not going to eat this food or drink this wine any longer.

[ 11 : 19 ] In a very polite and courteous and gracious way, Daniel approaches perhaps the principal of the college, the dean of the faculty, and says to him, look, according to our religion and our principles, we don't want to eat this food, but we're prepared to eat pulse, perhaps a vegetarian dish, and just water, and to allay any fears that this dean may have had, that at the end of the course, that these people have looked pretty worn out, he was assured by Daniel that if he put them to the test just for ten days, he would find out that they wouldn't suffer in any way, either physically or intellectually, they'd be able to get on with their work, get on with their studies, and perhaps even accut themselves as good as the other students.

Well, the man accepted that, and it turned out that at the end of the three-year course, far from falling behind the rest, they came out, as you would call it today, top of the class.

They were the men who carried all the awards and all the medals away with them, and all because they had taken this stand on a matter of principle, and without being either fanatical or bigoted in

any way, or presenting their case in an offensive way at all, they honoured God, and at the end of the day, it was sin that God honoured them.

Now you know that this is a great biblical principle, that whoever is prepared to honour God, no matter what it costs them, God will honour them.

As someone put it, no one ever loses with God. Now that was a stand that they took. What helped them, do you think, to take or to make this stand?

[13:24] Well, the verse tells us that Daniel purposed in his heart. It was what you and I would call today the product of prayerful thought.

It wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision at all. The problem confronting these Jewish youths was, how were they going to settle down in an alien land, dominated by a pagan religion, and still remain faithful to their God, and to the religion of their fathers.

And remember this, in Babylon, they had left behind them in Jerusalem, the temple, and the temple services, that always sustained their faith, and the whole structure of their community worship had been destroyed.

They had nothing. No church to go to. No public gatherings in the name of the Lord. They were alone. What do you think sustained them in that situation?

What enabled them to keep alive their principles and their religion and the biblical traditions handed down to them by their fathers?

[14:44] Well, do you not think, for example, that they disciplined themselves? They stilled themselves in this hostile environment? And by faithfulness and courage and wisdom and faith, they not only survived, but they overcame.

Faith survived when there was no outward form to sustain it, though this book itself makes it very clear that these men gave themselves often to private prayer.

And you can readily imagine that if the four of them were together, that they would meet in what people would probably call today a prayer cell to pray for one another in this situation in which they found themselves.

the prophet Monarchi tells us that in very dangerous days in Israel, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.

And I don't know of anything that is better calculated to strengthen a person's faith and to enable him and her to survive in a hostile environment such as this world is quite like Christian fellowship, good Christian company.

[16:12] It's not a good thing. I don't think it's a good thing for a Christian, committed Christian, especially a young Christian, to be too much on his or her own. I know that there are situations in which you have to be.

Perhaps there are situations which there is no one but yourself. But where you have a situation where there are other Christians, make use of their company, of their views, because there is strength in number.

And I think that these men are to be highly commendable. And by the way, the prophet Ezekiel refers to Daniel in very exalted company as a young man who was dedicated to God and to the faith of his fathers.

And here he was in Babylon with these other young men, like-minded, and though they had no form, outward form, by way of services and buildings to which they could come to sustain their faith, yet their faith was lively enough and strong enough to survive and to overcome.

I often wonder if perhaps we have the forum but not the power. The forum and not the life.

[17:40] Whereas these men had to make do without the forum and yet they had life in their faith. but let us now look at this particular stand that Daniel took.

He was determined from the heart after very prayerful consideration to abide by his own convictions whatever the cost and he came out of it well.

He came out of it tops as you would say. Now my friend, here is a principle which lies at the very heart of the exercise of our Christian faith.

There comes a time in the life of every Christian when he has to make a stand on the side of Christ and the Christian values in the faith of an unbelieving world.

Now the problem for Daniel was this, I don't want to go into the ins and outs of the dietary laws just now, but the problem really for Daniel was this, he'll tell you his finger on it. He requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

[ 18 : 55 ] For him to partake of this food and drink this wine was to defile himself as a believing Jew.

Now, at the very heart of the Christian confession is this, the belief that they have been forgiven their sins through faith in Christ.

In other words, a Christian is a person who has received cleansing through the forgiveness that he has by faith in Christ.

and there are many things which are therefore defiling to the cleansed Christian. Christ called all those whom he had forgiven, he called them to a new, to a different, to a separated life.

and Christ's purpose, I suggest to you, in coming into the life of any individual is to cleanse it from all defilement and to liberate that person from influences that corrupt or tend to corrupt, tend to pollute and tend to deprave.

[ 20 : 22 ] It was Jesus, no less, who said in the Sermon on the Mount, if thy right eye offend, they pluck it out. If thy right hand offend, they cut it off.

Better for thee to go halt, better for thee to go halt or maimed into heaven than to go whole into hell. And he was laying his finger there on this very principle, the things that are offensive, the things that are defiling, the things that deprave, the things that are wrong, the things that are inconsistent to a Christian, he must of necessity give these things that go by.

That is the principle enunciated by Jesus himself. Now, I would be the very first to acknowledge that this can be very difficult in a rapidly changing world with its ethical and religious outlook and its permitted customs.

These can be extremely powerful currents brought to bear upon the Christian. and I would also readily acknowledge that as society changes so it will be possible for the Christian to make some concessions to change and very often these concessions are based on matters which are not very important at all and I don't want to spend time mentioning some of the traditions and the practices which we ourselves observed which were quite ridiculous and as people began to apply the test of the word of God to these things they had to go of course we have to make concessions to change of course there are traditions and anyone with any intelligence will acknowledge that there are traditions and practices which have the taboos of communities on them which have no warrant whatsoever from the word of

God for such taboos and let's not be afraid to state that and let's not play to any gallery let's not play to a bigoted gallery but let us be fair let us be honest let us take a stand upon the word of God and let us always say that the rule must be the word of God because from a very early age most people in this church learned this catechism the word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy yet and here I want to quote someone to you the direction of the prevalent changes are often so radically alien to a Christian way that we cannot possibly follow it totally without losing our own power to witness clearly to what we believe is the nature of

[ 24 : 03 ] God and the gospel and the meaning of our life on earth now let's be perfectly sure about this every cry to the Christian to move upwards into the uplands of Christian freedom may not always lead you to the mountain upon which Jesus stands that's the point I want to make there are lands of Christian freedom which I would not call upland but down land which don't lead you nearer to the Lord but lead you further away from the Lord which are not a happier Christian witness but a hindrance which will not ingratiate you one little bit to an unbelieving and to a hostile world but which will leave you the ridicule of a world which makes standards for you as a

Christian that it will never make for itself and make no mistakes about that what some people call and I repeat myself what some people call the uplands of Christian freedom is nothing more than the exercise of their own individual will bordering on license to do what they like and I make this point having said and stressed that we are to take our stand not upon what he thinks or she thinks but on what the word of God says having said that you as a Christian I'm pretty certain will be the first to agree with me that the only way of stopping a hopeless drift away from

Christian standards is to stand with Daniel and to say no it's the only way to avoid spiritual anarchy because there are things that do define the Christian and unless we take that stand as someone put it we his work that is the work of Christ is negated his pleas go unheeded if we conform carelessly to whatever now becomes the done thing in the permissive moods that sweep our society into moral and spiritual change and this is what I said earlier the new spirit of the age is not always that of Christ now having said that let me try to home in on the few minutes that we have left here tonight to just make several very simple observations on this principle first of is the circumstances in

which each one of us may find ourselves do not warrant us to give up our Christian convictions evidence the Bible the Bible after all calls us to take a firm stand where others are compromising and drifting the the Bible the Bible calls us not to compromise with nor conform to the standards of the world and I quoted Jesus already on that on the sermon in the mount and I believe that the Bible also makes it abundantly clear that there are accepted ways and patterns which are the products of the world's thinking and not the products of Christ's thinking now then it's strange I must say when I left the month night I was in the study I've got a habit of when I'm preaching the summit crosses my mind

I've got a habit of saying things and then you've no idea what agonies of mind I go through for days and nights after it because I said that particular thing and I prayed to the Lord and I left the night Lord don't let me say anything tonight that I will regret it's strange you know for some time I've been wanting to say something about the exercise of Christian liberty the exercise of a Christian conscience and it's only since I came to this pulpit night that the thoughts struck me well last week I feel that I was led to start studying this book of Daniel with you and it so happens that the very first chapter as

[ 29 : 40 ] Daniel is introduced to us leads us to consider this very thing Christian principles Christian freedom taking a stand on the convictions that are born home to your heart by the teaching of the word of God and so I would say this that the Bible calls us never to sacrifice inner convictions which are based upon the word and it calls us never to lose touch with influences and teachings which are derived from the word of God that's the first point I want to make in applying this stand by your Christian convictions now in a minute I'm going to show you how this may cost you the second thing I remember is this that in Daniel's day the danger faced by these

Jewish communities in Babylon and by these Jewish young people in Babylon was that of drifting into complete conformity with the customs and traditions of the surrounding world and they felt and I think this comes out very clearly here they felt that the line had to be drawn firmly somewhere because their future as a people depended on their retaining their identity and their separateness now this is at the heart of Jewish thinking to this very day they retain their identity they retain their national separateness their distinctiveness from all the nations of the earth why because my friend God has given them that distinctiveness and that separateness God had and has a purpose for this people and do you not see that the same thing applies to the Christian church do you not see that Jesus has a similar purpose for his people is it not the case in the new testament that whatever else is true of those who were followers of the Lord that they were separate from the rest they had to take their stand they were identified as his the young girl who saw Peter in the hall of the high priest the Lord was betrayed said the same thing here you are you not one of them do you not belong to him do you not speak like his followers and as I've told you and you're probably sick fed up the back teeth hearing this is it not the case that whatever else a Christian is he is different in this world why because he's a strange individual because he's got idiosyncrasies no my friend because the Lord has made him different grace has singled him out grace has set him apart grace has made him what he is he has come out to use a favorite new testament term he has come out from the influences of this world he has been made to take a stand because he is different that's another principle the other principle is this when their religious interests clashed with the interests of Babylon they said a decisive no clearly decisively but politely you know this man comes across as a most gracious individual a thorough gentleman a lovely character no one spoke of as greatly beloved he was not offensive he was not a fanatic he was not a bigot he didn't stand and point a finger at this man and say you can't make me into this he put his case very very courteously you can take your stand and be courteous about it so

Daniel was now I grant you that this could have led and this was the dean the principal's fear it could have led to difficulties it could have led to difficulties for them it could have led to difficulties for him I don't know if he really meant that he might be put to death I'm not very sure what that means but it probably does mean this that look he says this could be a very difficult situation this could be filled with grave consequences for you and you know there are times when people take a stand on religious convictions when exactly that will be the response do you realize what this is going to you do you it could mean your job do you it could mean all hopes of promotion in the future well unfortunately stands that people have taken well thought out and biblically supported I'm not talking about stands that people take which are not biblically supported let me give you an example and I hope that I'm not mistaken when I say this

[ 35 : 39 ] I believe it's a case that when people sign on as merchant seamen they sign on for what is in effect a seven day contract and as such and we are dependent and have been for generations in Ireland depend on what has been brought to our shores especially a time when the merchant navy was a great industry in this country what would you and I have done how could we have survived if these men who had Christian convictions serving the merchant navy said look I'm going to work for six days I'm not going to get out of my bunk on the seventh or I'm going to spend the day reading my Bible and praying they were contracted and they are contracted what is a seven day week for any person who is contracted in an industry in which people are engaged in work which

I believe is perfectly permissible in accordance with the word of God I think that it would be to take a stand on an issue like that would be to take without the light of the word of God being applied to the situation but when you take a stand in the light of the word the support of the truth it may mean and as it has often meant the loss of employment it may mean persecution for some people it meant even death hence the many martyrs who have gone to the grave because of Christian convictions it may very well mean embarrassment but I don't think my friend at the end of the day it is always going to mean loss Joseph took a stand where did he end at the right hand of the king in Egypt Daniel took a stand where did he end the most respected individual in the whole of Babylon and under the

Persian reign the most respected individual of course people poor scorn of course you may feel embarrassed of course you may blush to the very roots of course but then as I said earlier if you take your stand on his side the Lord will provide that's another principle one of the things I want to mention is this that when people are tempted to a follow the ways of the world perhaps they will say well what difference does it make is it not after all permissible when it comes to Christian conscience and I grant you this is an area which I find extremely difficult if it comes to Christian conscience surely I'm free as a Christian to do what I like Paul after all when he was offered meat offered to idols he said well I'll eat it because it's perhaps permissible for me to eat it but then Paul knew there's another side to the page and was this by the way says though it may permissible to me if I do it it may be very damaging to somebody else and therefore because of what it's going to cost them

I won't do it and I think that this is a principle that young Christians will have to take on board in our day it's all very well for you to speak about the exercise of your Christian conscience and the liberty that God has given you I got that but I tell you something else that the Lord also has told you to take into account that what you do may have a detrimental effect upon someone else and that to my way of thinking is more important than you Christian liberty because the overall good of the cause of Christ is what must be of paramount importance to every single one of us and it pains me it really pains me that there are some young believers who are not prepared to take that on board may I give you a word of advice not that

I feel very old and I hope I don't look all that old though there are people who tell me that I do well that's alright let me give you a piece of advice always if you are confronted with a problem as a Christian what should I do in this situation why my friend won't you ask why won't you consult why won't you discuss not with the type of person who tells you you can do what you like but why won't you discuss with a person who's got a broader view of the issues involved than that there are some people who I know there are people who will take it and say ah it's you blinkered well I've no doubt there are some issues I may be blinkered and I would be

[ 41 : 19 ] I would seek advice I hope from other people I tell you this that to this day in the ministry of the gospel there are issues that confront me as a minister on which I seek advice from those who are better qualified than myself and people have more experience of life than I have myself and therefore I counsel you as a young Christian you can avoid many pitfalls if you seek advice from people who have your interests at heart and particularly your spiritual interests and who will always direct you I believe in this way and this is the best direction you will ever give get always in any situation consider the good name of the cause and of Christ and if you put that before your interests I'll tell you something you will never ever lose by it and of course you say to me ah well that's a bit hard hitting that's a bit difficult yes

I would be the first to agree with you of course it is hard hitting you see taking a stand will always lead you to suffer self-denial but you be prepared for that never mind what you're called never mind what you're called if you put him first and his cause first as Daniel did you won't lose by it and never mind the principle when in Rome do as the Romans do you remember that that can be a very

satanic temptation which has ruined many a young life and when there are places and practices which are extremely doubtful to say the least you give them the go by it's strange you know that there be so much anarchy and so much chaos in the

Christian church today why because being brought back into the lives of men and women boys and girls is much of the darkness from which people claim they have been delivered after all is it not the Bible that tells us that in Christ we are recreated or created anew in Christ Jesus you then as Spurgeon put it you dare to be a Daniel even if alone because remember this God and his word never change though the world in which you and I live do change some time ago

I was given a tape of an address delivered at Keswick convention some years ago I think I'm correct in saying the name of the preacher the speaker was Robert Amos I think he was speaking about Isaiah chapter 59 and how in Isaiah's day the church had drifted away from the standards of the word of God and become absorbed almost with the world and as this tape this man spoke I believe it's six or seven years ago six years anyway at that convention he wasn't a free church man and he certainly wasn't a Lewis man he was an Episcopalian a vicar

I believe from outside London and he who said in the course of his address and I was quite interested to hear this and I said to myself ah well it's great to hear a man from another culture with that totally different accent and from a completely different ecclesiastical background saying what is said so often here and in other places he was speaking about the day the time when he was converted and when he joined the Christian union the evangelical union in his university in our day he said and he was converted in the early 60s sometime just a few years after I was converted myself in my young days he said there were little or no problems for the Christians as to where he could go or where he should be seen no problem at all he said when grace touched our heart the line of demarcation was clearly drawn between what was permissible and not today he said that is not the case the line of demarcation has been almost obliterated and as I said he wasn't a free churchman and he wasn't a Lewis man and there are times when I feel if I could place on the spot someone from that background and with that accent and said to you young people what I am saying to you tonight there are times when

[ 47 : 42 ] I think you would accept it more readily from them than you would from me because after all I am a free churchman and I am a Lewisman but I hope my friend that what I am bringing before you is the word of God which reminds you tonight as a follower of Christ take your stand the line drawn by the word of God is a clearly defined one if you search and look and apply and in the words of another therefore dare to be a Daniel dare to stand alone dare to have a purpose for him and dare to make it known but how can I close without reminding you of this that there are others in this church tonight who have no

Christian convictions who have no Christian principles who have no problems as to where the line of demarcation is to be drawn because you are not committed to Christ and these things aren't a problem to you you drift you're in the world you can do what you like you can go where you like Christ and his word what does that matter the only influence on your life is the restraining influence of the common grace of God as it operates in this community and the day that God withdraws that from your life where then will you be what kind of life are you living where are you heading for what are you preparing yourself for oh my friend it takes courage to be a

Christian it takes courage to make a stand and if you're not prepared to do it you bear in mind there isn't a bigger coward on the face of the earth than you I invite you to associate yourself with this man and with his likes who for the sake of Christ are prepared to stand to stand even if it means standing alone let us pray oh to thou bless to us thy truth to give us grace to humble ourselves under thy mighty hand grace to seek to do that which is right to always remember thee above all else and to remember that we are accountable to thee

Lord God have mercy upon us keep us from every influence that would seek to destroy us and guide us with thy counsel for thy name's sake Amen