

THE KING OF KINGS

DANIEL 1

OUR KING CARES FOR US



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

We're living in tough and testing times. We're facing tough tests politically, socially, emotionally, relationally, financially, and spiritually. These tough and testing times raise lots of questions in our minds: What is God doing? Is God still King? Does our King care for us? These are all questions that the book of Daniel helps us to answer. Daniel chapter one answers the last question. Does our King care for us? Daniel 1 answers: "Yes, **Trust our King's care because he uses the hardest tests to produce the best results.**"

BACKGROUND

Having studied in Wisdom University for almost a full year, I thought it was time for a change. I invite you to spend a semester with me in Babylon University. It's the toughest University in the world and has campuses everywhere.

Daniel and the people of God ended up in Babylon University as a divine punishment for their sinful idolatry. God allowed his people to be conquered and captured by the King of Babylon about 600 BC. Although the exile of God's people looked like an act of the Babylonian king (1), the King of Kings was behind it all (2). The opening verses set the tone and reveal the theme of the whole book: **The King of Kings is still King**. The book divides into two main sections:

- **Faithful living in hostile times (1-6)**
- **Forward looking in hostile times (7-12)**

Daniel chapter one assured God's people that even the exile was an expression of the King of King's care. It says, **Trust the King's care because he uses the toughest tests to produce the best results.**



So, what are these tests?
Let's look at the tests Daniel faced in verses 1-8.



1. WE WILL BE TESTED IN BABYLON UNIVERSITY (1-7)

Babylon University tested Daniel in six ways.

1. The test of spiritual defeat (1-2): The book opens with a report on Babylon's defeat of Jerusalem. It's not just a serious political defeat but a devastating spiritual defeat. Babylon had destroyed God's house in Jerusalem and moved the temple furniture and treasures into a heathen shrine. The message was clear: Babylon defeated Israel and Babylon's god defeated Israel's God.

2. The test of seductive pleasures (3-4): Imagine you were a 14-year-old boy who'd been forcibly marched into a foreign country, separated from parents, living in a strange land, hearing only a foreign language. And then the King singles you out for preferential privileges and positions! They were offered high living and the high life.

3. The test of spiritual isolation (3-4): Sinclair Ferguson put it like this: "They were isolated from the influences that would mold their lives and characters in the ways of the Lord. In Babylon they were separated from the regular public worship of God, from the teaching of the Word of God, from the fellowship and wisdom of the people of God, and from the daily illustration of what it meant to be a citizen of Jerusalem. Separated from the furnace of godliness, the king anticipated that the last dying embers of true faithfulness to the Lord would die out."

4. The test of secular influences (4-5): Daniel and some of his friends were enrolled in a three-year-degree which would educate them in Babylonian language and literature. They were being isolated from God's people and God's teaching and indoctrinated in secular ways of thinking. Babylon knew that if it could change the way Daniel thought, it could change what Daniel believed and how Daniel lived.

5. The test of small compromise (5): The king assigned Daniel and friends a daily portion of his food and drink. Daniel and his friends refused it, probably because it had already been offered to heathen gods in a ceremony that acknowledged them as the givers of all good. It wasn't a big compromise, but Daniel knew small compromises lead to big compromises.

6. The test of identity theft (6-7): Babylon's chief civil servant renamed Daniel and three of his friends. All four of them had the God of Israel in their names. All four Babylonian names had Babylonian gods in their names. Hearing their Babylonian names day after day was intended to gradually erase their memory of their past identity as God's people.



CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Are you passing the test of assimilation?

God's people were tested with torture in Egypt, then with assimilation in Babylon. The tests were different, but the aim was the same: the obliteration of God. We are still being tested with Babylonization, with assimilation, to obliterate God from our minds, lips, and world. Are you passing or failing?

Where do your loyalties lie? In the Bible, Babylon and Jerusalem are two great and competing cities and worldviews. Each is out to exterminate the other (Genesis 3:15), The message is that Babylon the great will fall (Rev. 18-19), and the new Jerusalem will be established (Rev. 21-22), and there's a hint of that even in verse 2. Which city are you loyal too?

ASSIMILATION IS MORE
DANGEROUS THAN PERSECUTION.



I'm really nervous about these tests. I fear I'll fail.
Is it possible to pass?



2. WE CAN STAY PURE IN BABYLON UNIVERSITY (8-14)

Daniel resolved to be faithful (8)

Daniel drew a spiritual line in the sand. He looked at the king's food and wine, and knew that he would please the king if he ate and drank. But he also knew it would displease the King of kings. The food was delicious but defiling. It would fill his stomach but poison his soul. He therefore made a spiritual resolution not to even touch it, never mind taste it. This was his opportunity to resist Babylonization and assert his true identity and distinctiveness. "I resolve to maintain distinctiveness and refuse defilement," he said.

Daniel explained his faith (9-14)

Daniel's resolution began in the privacy of his own heart but resulted in a conversation with the chief Babylonian official. Daniel said to him, "I don't want to defile myself with the king's food." He could have found some other excuse (allergies?), but instead was totally truthful. Though honest and principled he was not rude and obnoxious. He reasoned and explained himself when the request was initially refused and then asked for his request to be tested for ten days. He was wise and tactful but firm and fearless.

God honored Daniel's faithfulness in two ways. First **he gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs** (9), and second he helped Daniel persuade the official to allow the experiment to proceed.

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Be faithful in small things. Faithfulness begins with small challenges and private tests. This wasn't as big or as public as the den of lions or the fiery furnace, but it's where that later faithfulness began and was trained. His friends didn't get barbecued in the furnace, because they refused the barbecued at the feast. He wasn't eaten by the king of the jungle because he refused to eat food from the King of Babylon.

An exiled heart is a resolved heart. Exiles are usually more patriotic than those who have never left their own country. They grab opportunities to preserve and express their identity with other exiles (e.g. St. Patrick's Day parades). This is why we gather with other exiles as often as possible – to express and preserve our distinct identity, our heavenly citizenship (Ps. 137:1-6; Phil. 3:20).

AN EXILED HEART
IS A RESOLVED HEART



Will faithfulness not mean loss?
It might, but it means more gain.



3. WE CAN FLOURISH IN BABYLON UNIVERSITY (15-21)

Physical flourishing (15-16)

They passed God's test and the eunuch's test with flying colors. God's blessing made them healthier than the king's banquet.

Intellectual flourishing (17-19)

This is the third time we see God's quiet sovereignty in this chapter (2, 9, 17). God more than made up for what they lost. They gave up steak, desert, and wine but God gave them learning, skill, wisdom. They stood up to the king and therefore stood before the king (19).

Spiritual flourishing (20-21)

They weren't equal to the other students. They weren't slightly better than the other students. They were ten times better than not just the students but the other spiritual leaders in the king's court (1 Sam. 2:30).

CHANGE YOUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Are you faithful by faith? How was Daniel so faithful? Because he was a man of faith (Heb. 11:33-34). Faithfulness flows from faith

but Daniel is still there. Kings come and go but the King of Kings is faithful to his people.

God is faithful. The focus throughout this chapter is not simply the faithfulness of Daniel and his three friends; it's on God's faithfulness to them. He's faithful in disciplining his people (2) and faithful in delivering his people (9, 17). There's another King in Babylon who cares for us. Verse 21 takes us to 70 years later. Nebuchadnezzar is long dead, Babylon has fallen to King Cyrus,

Christ is our faithfulness. Our ultimate hope is not our faithfulness, but Christ's. He was tested with attack and assimilation, but remained pure in Babylon. He was a faithful exile, and was rewarded with a flourishing legacy. We don't rely on our own faithfulness and then top it up with Christ's when we fail. Our total faith is in his total faithfulness.

CHRIST'S FAITHFULNESS IS
IS NOT OUR FALL-BACK,
IT'S OUR FALL-FORWARD.



Hear God's story > Change your story > Tell the story



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: Caring King, I trust you to care for me in the toughest tests because you use the toughest tests to produce the best results. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What tests are you facing in these days?
2. How is God testing us with the pressure of assimilation today?
3. In what ways do you show loyalty to Jerusalem rather than Babylon?
4. Look back on your life and describe a time when you drew a spiritual line in the sand,
5. How can you cultivate more of an exile heart?
6. Tell about a time when God demonstrated 1 Samuel 2:30 in your life.

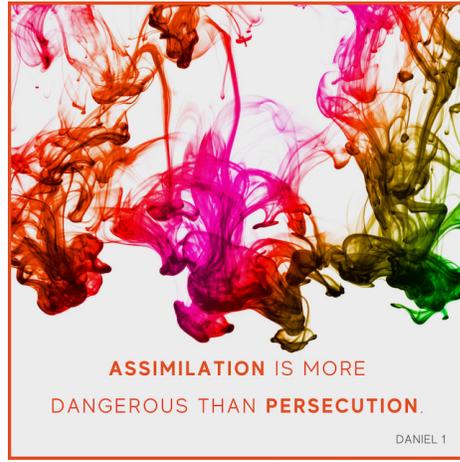
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