

# Counterstrategy of Obedience in Gentile Kingdoms

📖 Daniel 1:8-21

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In Dan 1:1 Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem and besieged it. In 1:2 the Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand, this is a disciplinary move of God. Nebuchadnezzar took some of the vessels out of the Temple in Jerusalem and put them in the house of his god, Marduk, signifying his interpretation of the victory as due to the superiority of his god Marduk over the God of Israel. But the use of Adonai for "Lord" signifies that it's the God of Israel who was in control of the situation, a very different state of affairs than Nebuchadnezzar imagined. In 1:3 Ashpenaz was ordered to evaluate the captives according to seven criteria to determine whether they would be trained to enter into the king's personal service. In 1:4 the first three criteria are physical; young in age, 14-17 years old, no defect, meaning no physical defect, and good looking, attractive young men; the next three are mental; capacity to learn, theoretical knowledge in every area of life and applicational knowledge; the last one is personality. The seven criteria had to be met to qualify for training to serve in the king's personal service. Those who passed would be instructed in two things. First, the language of the Chaldeans. This language was old Akkadian. It was a scholarly language. Second, the literature of the Chaldeans. This literature expressed the Babylonian worldview into which they were to be indoctrinated; law, math, science, art, architecture, manners, customs, traditions, the whole nine yards. In 1:5 paganism is smart, it gives a full scholarship, it pays the way, it provides the most nutritious food, the highest quality wine. The goal of this strategy was that by the end of the three years the students would be loyal to the worldview and crown of Nebuchadnezzar. That way they can help him administer his rule over the rest of the Jewish people. As a first step, 1:6 and 7 show that on the first day of school their names were changed from their beautiful Hebrew names that honored the Hebrew God; Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, to the ugly Babylonian names that honored the Babylonian gods; Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. It's a total makeover. This is the strategy of paganism. We need to be aware of this strategy because if we're not we'll get sucked into it like all the other Jewish students did. If it hadn't been for Daniel even his three roommates would have probably got sucked in. So this young man led the way. And those of you here who are young people, I expect you to lead the way when the time comes. We have enough followers. We need leaders, strong leaders.

Today we come to Dan 1:8-21 where we find how these four men requested to opt out when faced with a non-kosher menu, how they presented an empirical test, how the Lord honored them for this decision, how they advanced in the school, and the results at the end of the three years. What they learned was that even though the nation Israel was under divine discipline for disobeying the Mosaic Law, if they as individual Jews followed the Law God would bless them. So the lesson today is about the importance of separating from pagan culture where it contradicts the word of God and how the Lord will honor our obedience to Him.

In verse 8 we have Daniel, about 15 years old, and take note of his character. **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.** What happened on the first day of class was the official menu came to Daniel. He saw the food and the drink and he thought long about the food and the drink. Food and drink were big issues under the Law of Moses. Food and drink were divided into clean and unclean, kosher and non-kosher foods. This had nothing to do with nutritional value, it had to do with Israel being a separate people. That is the whole issue and that is the only issue. This young man saw the menu and he was sensitive to the menu because he was sensitive to the Mosaic Law. Whatever food and drink he was looking at was forbidden by the Mosaic Law. So did this young man know the word of God? He didn't have the word of God at the time. The word of God would have been outlawed. So how did he know the word of God? He had hidden it in his heart. How does this happen? How does the word of God get in our heart?

Training. Turn to Deuteronomy 6. We can tell from Daniel's name that he had godly parents. They named him "God is my judge." And one thing a godly parent recognizes is that his number one ministry is to his wife and kids, not some other person, not some other kid. Lots of times what happens is a pastor ministers to everyone but his own family and then his own family goes to pot. That's why they have an acronym for pastor's kids, PK's and everyone knows about PK's, they're brats, and all that signifies a failure on the pastor's part to recognize his number one ministry God gave him was his wife and kids, not the congregation, not some other person, and if he fails with his wife and kids he'll fail in the church because what's the requirement of an elder? That he be successful ruler of his family. So ruling one's own family well is a pre-requisite to ruling in Christ's church. Don't ever forget that. You don't have to go 1,000 miles to minister, you can do it right in your own home. Now you can go 1,000 miles. That's an extension of your ministry and that's fine, that's good. But it starts in the home.

Now the godly Jewish parents recognized this because they read Deut 6:5. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart." Is it imperative that the word of God be on your heart? Absolutely. The words strung together amount to ideas and ideas strung together amount to a worldview. So the point is that you have God's worldview inscribed upon your heart. And what do you have to do to get God's worldview inscribed upon your heart? You've got to go over the ideas. It's repetition. All training is repetition and repetition can get boring but you have to go over it and over it and over it because when the world collapses around you you're going to

respond according to your training. And if you haven't been trained you're going to collapse right along with the world around you. Verse 7 gives the means of training. "You [that's the parents] shall teach them [that's the commandments] diligently to your sons," that's the first thing, teach them, but not just teaching them, teaching them diligently, it doesn't just happen, it takes self-discipline on the part of the parent, it's the chief priority in raising children. Everything else is nothing compared to this, teach them the word of God, formal Bible study. But it's more than that as he goes on he shows that it's connected to all of life, this is informal, "and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." So all day, all the time, in the house, outside the house, when you get up, when you lay down, this is your conversation, it's revolving around the word of God no matter what your topic of discussion, no matter what your environment, no matter what you're doing together as a family, every experience together is a teaching opportunity. This is how the godly Jewish parents trained their children. As a supplement to this the nation Israel had three annual feasts, that was national training. They'd go up to Jerusalem as a nation, learn about their history in the Passover, have their national constitution read to them in the hearing of all. This was the way it was done. So the primary training was in the home, both formally and informally in everyday life, and secondary training was as a nation in Jerusalem. Their whole life was to revolve around the word of God so that the biblical worldview sunk in and you learned to habitually respond in all situations according to the word of God.

Now Daniel's found himself in a situation. He's 15 years old and he's been ripped away from family and home and country, he's been driven 800 miles on foot, he's undergone physical, mental and personality tests and he's had his name changed. And now this man is faced with a menu that is contrary to the dietary code of the Mosaic Law. What is this young man going to do? Is he going to take the easy road and eat the food and drink the wine? I mean, it is good food and wine, the best! How is he going to deal with this? This is food and wine given to him by a foreign King, a king who just conquered his people. That's the battle Daniel was having in his soul in 1:8. And what decision did he make? He followed the training! He followed the law that was written on his heart through years of training. **Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine.** In the Hebrew this is a firm decision. He decided and that's it. Now it says it **would defile** him. How would it defile him? For three reasons. First of all, who prepared the food? Gentiles prepared it. By that very fact alone the food was unclean. Gentiles were unclean so if they touched the food it became unclean. Secondly, some of the foods may have been clean like venison and chicken, but some of it would have been ham and you can't mix the clean with the unclean food, that was contrary to the Mosaic Law. Third, who's food was it? The king's food. Since it was the king's food it would have been sacrificed to the Babylonian gods and goddesses before it was served. According to Exod 34:15 the Jews were not to eat food sacrificed to idols. Now in the king's mind, and this may be the main reason for assigning them this food, when you ate the food sacrificed to the gods that would insure the favor of the gods upon you. So he may have assigned them this food to introduce them to the Babylonian religion just like he changed their names to identify them with the Babylonian religion.

So for these three reasons the food would defile Daniel; one it was prepared by Gentiles, two, some of it was unclean and three, it had been sacrificed to idols.

But that's not all, the wine would defile Daniel too. How? For one, it was probably also dedicated to the gods in the pagan temples. Two, it was undiluted with water. The only wine authorized in Israel by the Mosaic Law was diluted with water, and they diluted it in some places 1:3, in other places 1:4 and in other places as much as 1:10. But to drink unmixed wine was to drink strong drink and that was condemned by the Mosaic Law. So the drink would defile too. Daniel **made up his mind** verse 8 **that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank.** Now he has to take action to get a change of menu and what this shows is that Daniel is trusting the Lord and seeking to obey the Lord. And, of course, he's willing to live with the consequences of whatever happens.

Middle of verse 8. **So he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.** The commander was Ashpenaz, we met him last week in verse 3. He was responsible for training these men in the Babylonian worldview. And evidently Daniel requested another menu and he would have to explain to Ashpenaz the nature of the defilement. Now in a way this is civil disobedience and Daniel is one of the major players in the doctrine of civil disobedience along with the Hebrew midwives in the Book of Exodus and the apostles in the Book of Acts. Those three events are case studies in how to commit civil disobedience. And here you see one of the shrewd ways you can go about this. When the government tells you to do something that's against the Lord You can request to opt out for religious reasons. You don't have to be a bonehead about it and throw a fit. Just be polite and respectful and ask permission to opt out. They're going to say, why is this against your beliefs? And you're going to have to explain it to them. Daniel explained to Ashpenaz why he didn't want to eat the food the king appointed for him, it was because YHWH said that menu would defile him. And you can see that this is going to lead to an opportunity to testify. So one of the routes we can take when the government tells us to do something against the Lord is simply ask permission to opt out for our religious beliefs. There may be consequences for this request but you have to be willing to face the consequences.

But what do we notice in verse 9? God honors Daniel's obedient action. God goes to work for Daniel. Daniel honored Him, **Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials.** What happened was Ashpenaz started to look upon Daniel with favor and with compassion unlike all the other students in the school. And it had nothing to do with his hairstyle, it had nothing to do with his personality, it had nothing to do with anything natural, it had everything to do with a providential thing God did with this **commander.** So already we see that when we trust and obey the Lord honors that and starts working on our behalf. And in the years to come this will serve as an example for Jews of how to live among the Gentiles as well as for you and for me. And how you don't compromise, you don't say, well, the LORD will understand if I break His commandments because I'm out here in this foreign country and I have no other option than to disobey God and I'm sure God will understand. No, God will not understand. Daniel said I'm going to obey the

Lord and because of that the Lord is honoring Daniel in that he's elevating Daniel, he's becoming noteworthy in the eyes of the commander.

But in 1:10 note that the commander is still hesitant, **the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king."** What's going on is Nebuchadnezzar is a Middle East dictator. And if you know anything about Middle East dictators they're all tyrants. They're the same today. Nebuchadnezzar didn't mess around, if you disobeyed he'd have you hooked up to two teams of horses facing opposite directions and then say giddy up. And that would be the end of you. So he says, **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?** That is, why should he see you looking unhealthy? **Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.** So he basically rejects Daniel's request to opt out and most Christians would think, well, God just closed that door, that's not an open door and therefore it's not God's will so I shouldn't pursue that door anymore. But a closed door does not necessarily mean it's not God's will, you can't interpret your experience that way. Experience means nothing, the word of God means everything. So Daniel has to find another way, otherwise he'll defile himself and he already made a firm decision he's not going to do that.

In verse 11 a second request, and this one's a bit different. **But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,** and you can see there that all four of them had decided not to defile themselves; Daniel's the leader, but none of them want to defile themselves. This time Daniel comes to the **overseer**, apparently this man was directly appointed over these four guys which shows you there were a lot of guys in the school and Ashpenaz had a lot of responsibilities so he had to delegate some of it to lesser officials. Daniel goes to the lesser official and says, verse 12, **Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.** Now again, this would be a form of civil disobedience. Except there are a few differences. First of all, there's nothing stated about defilement. That's not put forth as the reason. This time it's just a test, hey let's do an empirical test. Maybe these guys will buy that one. They didn't buy the religious card, let's play the empirical card. Will you please do a ten-day experiment? Notice the **please**, he's very cordial, he's not nasty. The second difference is he requested it of a lesser official, the **overseer** whom Ashpenaz, the senior commander, placed directly over these four young men. And thirdly, the test is not open ended but limited to ten days, so it's not like it's going to be the end of the world, in ten days nothing too bad could happen from eating vegetables and drinking water. But on the flipside, what this means is that it's crunch time, now there's only ten days for God to work and make an observable difference in these young men's appearance compared to the other men. And that's going to require a miracle of God, food won't naturally make that much difference in ten days, especially when it's an inferior diet of vegetables and water. So clearly these men trust God is going to do a miracle. And this again will train Jews how to live among Gentile nations, how to trust God for the results.

So the suggested menu here would all be clean foods, no vegetable was outlawed by the Mosaic Law and the word includes grains, so vegetables and grains along with water which was fine to drink. It's kind of a boring diet but he requests it all the same to remain obedient to the word of God.

In verse 13 the empirical challenge is laid out, **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.**" So he respectfully says, you decide, after ten days take a look at us, it'll be empirical, you evaluate and you decide what you want to do, and whatever you want us to do, we'll do.

Verse 14, **So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.** Now this is the **overseer** and it's interesting that he granted this without consulting Asphenaz. Maybe he thought it would be interesting, I don't know, but this is where we see that God was granting Daniel favor and compassion in the eyes of the overseer. And the overseer may be trying to get an edge over the other overseers so he can get a promotion. We don't know but the bottom line is it's just ten days so let's see what happens.

Verse 15, **At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter, fatter** meaning healthier, they appeared healthier, probably you could tell they were in better health by their skin color, the alertness of their eyes and the extra weight, they weren't fat, it's just that they were looking better and stronger and this is clearly a work of God because vegetables and water don't do that. So God, here again, and this is the principle you see throughout the narrative, if you honor the Lord by trusting and obeying His word, then He will bless you.

We come to verse 16, **So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink.** They've successfully committed civil disobedience and they never had to throw a fit, they never had to raise a hand, they just politely proposed an empirical test. And now, on a continual basis, for the remainder of the three years he **kept giving them vegetables.** So Daniel and his friends did not defile themselves. They have kept obedience to the Lord and that's the number one thing in life.

Now in verse 17 at the end of the three years we see the final results, **As for these four youths,** distinguishing them from all the other youths, **God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.** Now this is interesting because God caused the four to excel in their studies, the natural study had to take place and I'm sure all four of them did their very best, but even doing their very best God gave them a supernatural increase in the areas of **knowledge and intelligence** far above the other students. The word **knowledge** in the Hebrew refers to "knowledge which is attained through the five senses." The word **intelligence** refers to "the process of thinking through a complex set of thoughts and organize them in a manner in which they can be dealt with wisely." So we would say that they were extremely educated to the point that even if they did not know everything that the Babylonian culture

knew, they could by careful thought figure it out because they understood the Babylonian worldview and they could think as Babylonians. All in just three years.

Now their **knowledge and intelligence** was **in every branch of literature and wisdom**. The **literature** refers to the Babylonian literature that they studied in the scholarly old Akkadian language. So they mastered the books in the Babylonian libraries. The **wisdom** refers to skill, skill in the various areas of thought whether it be mathematical thoughts, aviary thoughts, botanical thoughts, marine thoughts, political thoughts, economic thoughts, military thoughts, they were able to master these areas of thought from within the Babylonian worldview.

Now what's interesting, and one of the reasons this is pointed out in verse 17, is that God gave them this superior knowledge and intelligence of a pagan worldview but they didn't buy into the worldview. They understood it, they could think through the logical implications of the system, but they did not for a second believe it. God gave them supernatural understanding of a pagan worldview in order to elevate them in that kingdom. So He was blessing them in order to put them in positions of rule in a Gentile kingdom. That's one of the things you see among the Jews whatever nation they're living in, they march right to the top of the ladder. It's one of many Jewish anomalies in the world, a radical disproportion of Jews in top positions among Gentiles.

Now young people, I think we can get some direction here on how to live in a pagan culture. One day you may go to the university campus. What are you going to do? You're going to be presented a lot of facts interpreted within the pagan worldview of our culture. Some Christians are such ditzes they think you should shield your kid from this stuff. I think that is stupid. I say you do like Daniel and his friends, you learn the pagan stuff and not only do you learn it, you learn it so well that you can think through the logical implications and spit it out on the test, ace the classes, get an A++, but while you're doing that just don't buy into the worldview. There's nothing wrong with mastering the pagan worldview, what's wrong is buying into the pagan worldview. So don't be glib about having to sit through these classes that teach pagan doctrine, learn it, learn to see the holes, learn how to refute it, spit it out on the test, get the best grade in the class and then go on. That's what these guys did and God even helped them do it. There's a tremendous lesson here.

But as for **Daniel**, notice verse 17, **Daniel** is peeled away from the other three here, **Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams**. Now **visions** you can participate in and interact with because you're awake and most of the visions in the Bible the person who sees the vision gets to participate in the vision. But the dreams in the Bible you can't participate or interact in because your asleep. So Daniel got some of both, but actually is the emphasis on Daniel having visions and dreams? No, it's on Daniel understanding them. So this ability was given to Daniel alone. The other three did not get this. The knowledge and intelligence required diligent effort on all of their part, but understanding visions and dreams was a sheer gift of God, and no matter how hard Daniel tried he could never contribute anything.

Now why are we told this at this time? One reason this ability is lodged in verse 17 is because the Babylonians, like all pagans, had trained experts in interpreting visions and dreams. They believed you could do this and they used certain techniques of divination. We're going to be introduced to these specialists next week. But Daniel, while he read books about how to do it like the Babylonians, it was not a true science, it was a pseudo-science, there are no techniques for interpreting visions and dreams, it's only divine revelation that can do that. So Daniel was given this special gift and we'll see the Babylonian specialists fail to interpret the visions and dreams but Daniel succeeds, and the reason is because only God can reveal them.

A second reason this is included in verse 17 at this point is to prepare us for chapter 2 because here Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and Daniel is going to be the one who tells him the dream and interprets the dream. So at this point we are alerted to the fact that God blessed Daniel with this ability for being a leader of the other three Jews in trusting the word of God and obeying the Mosaic dietary laws.

Now verse 18, **Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them**, the period was three years, so the year in verse 18 is 603 or 602BC, if you make notes in your margin you might put the dates down because the chapters are not in chronological order, verse 1 is 605BC, by verse 18 it's 603/602BC, Daniel is probably 17 or 18 years old. At that time **the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar**. So it's time for the final exam and the king personally administered the exam.

Verse 19, **The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah**; so perhaps hundreds of young men from the various countries the Babylonians conquered and not a single one, the emphasis is on no individual was even close to the four vegetarians. That's not an endorsement of vegetarianism; it's an endorsement of obedience to the word of God. Obedience brings forth blessing and here we see it. The king talked with each one of them and he examined their fluency in the Akkadian language, he examined their knowledge of the Babylonian worldview, he examined their personal appearance, he may have had attendants help him in the investigation, but in all these things they were far above any of the other students. **So they entered the king's personal service**. They received the top governmental positions, they served the king personally. And the others, well, they probably received positions but none as high as Daniel and his friends. They were at the top of their class and this is one of the great illustrations of God taking care of those who put His will first in their lives. I hope you heard that young people.

Verse 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**. Ten times is a Hebrew idiom meaning "many times," they were far better and notice, he doesn't say better than their fellow classmates, though they were, but far better **than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm**, those are the native Babylonians, they were a class of academics, they were scholars and in just three years they far excelled them. This is a testimony of the great blessing of God upon His own when they trust Him for the



results and obey. There’s no way this can be done naturally. It’s got to be a miraculous work of God and that’s the point!

Verse 21, **And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.** We don’t know how long the other three continued but Daniel continued until 536BC which was **the first year of Cyrus the king**, that’s 70 years, the entire Babylonian kingdom because **Cyrus** is a Persian king. Cyrus doesn’t come on the scene till 536BC, so that’s a long time, almost all of Daniel’s life, Daniel is going to be in the government until he’s in his 80’s. As you notice on Chart 5 this man survived seven administrations and a shift in kingdoms.

Kingdoms and Kings Daniel Continued Under		
Kingdom	King	Regal Years
Babylon	Nebuchadnezzar	605-562 BC
Babylon	Evil-Marodach	562-560 BC
Babylon	Nariglissar	560-556 BC
Babylon	Labashi-Marduk	556 BC (3 or 9 months?)
Babylon	Nabonidus/co-rex Belshazzar	605-562 BC
Medo-Persia	Darius the Mede	605-562 BC
Medo-Persia	Cyrus the Persian	605-562 BC

**Chart 5.** The two kingdoms and seven governments that Daniel continued to reign under.

You have to have tremendous political skill and adaptability to survive One administration, much less seven and a shift in kingdoms. This is utterly astonishing. To survive this you have to be an indispensable asset. Daniel was a remarkable politician and ruler. And this is one of the reasons that the Jews classified Daniel among the Writings and not among the Prophets. He was a wise governmental ruler, an outstanding statesman and it’s a testimony to what God will do for the Jew who follows His word and it’s what He will do for you too.

So in conclusion, the lesson is that these four men engaged in civil disobedience politely, respectfully in order to obey the Lord and as a result God worked on their behalf to not only grant them favor in the eyes of the commander, but to miraculously advance them to be far superior to every other student in the school and even the native Babylonian scholars. And by this they were exalted to the highest positions in the Babylonian kingdom, the personal service of the king.

The lesson for us is two things. First, Daniel was a leader. Are you young people going to be leaders? Or are you just going to follow the crowd? I sure hope you’re going to be a leader because this world needs leaders. Young people are looking for someone to lead. Why not you? Second, Daniel and his friends made a firm decision to not defile themselves by breaking the Law of Moses. Are you going to make a firm decision not to break the Law of Messiah? Third, Daniel and his friends trained in the pagan worldview around them. Do you understand the

pagan worldview around you? There's nothing wrong with understanding the pagan worldview. What's wrong is buying into it. We need to understand it so we can learn not only how to function in it but to thrive spiritually. Fourth, Daniel and his friends requested to opt out when government policy contradicted the word of God. When that failed they requested an empirical test be done. Are you willing to take such actions if the government tells you to disobey the word of God?