

Daniel 1:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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 of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Analysis

The Hebrew phrase "purposed in his heart" (yasem al-libo, יָשַׁם עַל-לִבּוֹ) literally means "set upon his heart" or "determined in his inner being," indicating a deliberate, firm decision rooted in Daniel's deepest convictions. The word "defile" (yitgaal, יִתְגַּאֵל) comes from the root meaning "to pollute" or "make ceremonially unclean." Daniel recognized that eating the king's food would compromise his covenant faithfulness to Yahweh, likely because it included unclean animals (Leviticus 11), meat sacrificed to idols, or violated other dietary laws.

This verse reveals several crucial theological principles:

1. genuine faith requires deliberate commitment before testing comes
2. faithfulness in "small" matters of daily obedience prepares for larger trials
3. believers can respect earthly authority while maintaining ultimate allegiance to God
4. conviction without action is mere sentiment—Daniel "requested" permission to remain faithful.

Daniel didn't defiantly refuse but respectfully sought an alternative, demonstrating wisdom in navigating competing authorities.

The phrase "therefore he requested" (vayevakesh, וַיִּבְקֶשׁ) shows Daniel combined

principled conviction with gracious diplomacy. He didn't loudly proclaim his superiority or condemn Babylonian practices; he simply lived according to God's standards while maintaining respect for his captors. This models how believers engage hostile cultures—firm conviction expressed through gracious engagement rather than combative confrontation. Daniel's stand points to Christ, who remained sinless while fully engaging a fallen world, and whose perfect obedience accomplished what our flawed faithfulness cannot.

Historical Context

This event occurred in 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar deported Jerusalem's nobility after his victory over Egypt at Carchemish. Daniel was likely 15-17 years old, forcibly removed from his homeland, family, and temple worship. The Babylonian policy was to acculturate conquered elites—changing their names, education, diet, and identity to serve the empire. Daniel's Hebrew name ("God is my judge") was changed to Belteshazzar ("Bel protects his life"), explicitly honoring a Babylonian deity.

The king's food (pat-bag hamelekh, פַּת־בַּג הַמֶּלֶךְ) literally means "portion of delicacies from the king"—a privilege indicating royal favor and social advancement. Refusing this honor risked severe consequences in an honor-shame culture where accepting the king's hospitality created bonds of loyalty. Ancient Near Eastern kings used communal meals to establish patron-client relationships and enforce allegiance.

Daniel's stand required extraordinary courage for a teenage exile with no power, status, or protection. Yet he demonstrated that youthful faithfulness, rooted in earlier spiritual formation, can withstand immense pressure. His request succeeded not through human manipulation but divine favor—God gave Daniel "favour and tender love" with the prince of eunuchs (Daniel 1:9). This historical account encouraged Jewish communities facing Hellenization under the Seleucids and continues challenging believers to maintain distinct identity while engaging culture redemptively.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What daily practices and small obediences build the spiritual foundation needed for major tests of faith?
2. How can you combine firm conviction about biblical truth with gracious, respectful engagement of those who disagree?
3. In what areas is cultural pressure tempting you to compromise faithfulness for career advancement or social acceptance?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּשָּׂם דָּנִיֵּאל עַל לִבּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִתְגַּאֲלֶה:
purposed **But Daniel** H5921 **in his heart** H834 H3808 **that he might not defile**
H7760 H1840 H3820 H1351

בְּפִתְּבֵי ג הֶמָּה לֶךְ וּבִי יַיִן מִשְׁתֵּי יוֹ
himself with the portion **of the king's** **nor with the wine** **which he drank**
H6598 H4428 H3196 H4960

וַיִּבְקֹשׁ מֶשֶׁר הַסְּרִיסִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא
therefore he requested **of the prince** **of the eunuchs** H834 H3808
H1245 H8269 H5631

יִתְגַּאֲלֶה:
that he might not defile
H1351

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 141:4 (Parallel theme): Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

Psalms 119:115 (Parallel theme): Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God.

1 Corinthians 7:37 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.

Psalms 119:106 (Parallel theme): I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

Acts 11:23 (Parallel theme): Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

Daniel 1:5 (Kingdom): And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

2 Corinthians 9:7 (Parallel theme): Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

Deuteronomy 32:38 (Parallel theme): Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection.