

Daniel and the King's Food



Scripture Reference: [Daniel 1](#)

Suggested Theme: God is holy and wants us to live holy lives wherever we are. Following God should effect all parts of our lives.

Memory Verse: "So if you eat, or if you drink, or if you do anything, do everything for the glory of God." [1 Corinthians 10:31, ICB](#)

Story Overview:

When Judah turned away from God, God allowed the enemy nation of Babylon to capture the Jews and take them away to Babylon. The temple and the city walls of Jerusalem were destroyed. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon commanded that the brightest and most handsome captives be educated and taught to serve in the Babylonian courts. When Daniel and three other young Jews were told to eat the king's food, they refused because it was food that God had forbidden Jews to eat. When the officials saw that these young men were healthier and stronger when they obeyed God's food laws, they allowed them to continue obeying the Lord. These four young men impressed the king because they were smarter than all the men in the king's court.

Background Study:

God's People Taken Captive and Deported to Babylon

Jehoiakim was still king of Judah when Daniel and others were taken captive by the king of Babylon in 605 BC. During Daniel's first years in Babylon, things did not improve back in Judah. Daniel and his friends watched as many other Jews joined them in this foreign city.

When Jehoiakim died, his son, Jehoiachin, was king for only three months when Babylon's King, Nebuchadnezzar, attacked Jerusalem. Jehoiachin and 10,000 of the most prominent Jews were taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar put Jehoiachin's 21-year-old uncle on the throne, and his name was changed to Zedekiah.

Eventually, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and the great city of Jerusalem finally fell ([2 Kings 25](#)). Zedekiah was cruelly made to watch the execution of his sons, and then his eyes were put out. Priests were slaughtered, and the temple was destroyed. Jerusalem was left in ruins, and the final captives were taken to Babylon. This happened in 587 BC.

[Background Information on the Divided Kingdom.](#)

Life in Babylon for Daniel and the Other Captives

Meanwhile, Daniel and the Jewish captives in Babylon had to survive and try to make the best of their new lives. They had to learn how to follow Jewish law in a place where the people in charge did not honour God. The Law of Moses was meant to shape worship, relationships, work and even what one could and could not eat.

Daniel and other young men were chosen to live at the palace and be educated. Nebuchadnezzar had conquered many nations besides Judah, and he was gathering the best brains from all of them to be trained as helpers in his government.

The king planned a three-year course of study for these young men, so Daniel had the opportunity to acquire the best possible education of the day. The Babylonians knew math, astronomy, and medicine. Chemistry and metallurgy were established “sciences” of Daniel’s time, and theology and philosophy would also have been included.

The man in charge of the young men gave them Babylonian names. “Daniel” was Hebrew for “my judge is God.” His new name, “Belteshazzar,” meant “protect his life,” and honoured a Babylonian god, Bel.

He ordered for them what he thought was the very best of food and drink. The food and wine assigned to the young men from the king’s table were probably very rich, luxurious, rare foods that only the wealthy could afford. But the problem with the king’s food and wine was that they had all been involved in worship ceremonies to heathen idols, and anyone who ate them was honouring the idol.

Also, God had given the Hebrews strict laws about food. Even in what they ate, Jews showed that God was to be honoured. Pork and some other kinds of meat were not to be used at all, and when cattle or sheep were killed, the blood was to be carefully drained from them. These rules were not followed in Babylon. Daniel felt he would be defiled and dishonour God if he did not keep God’s laws.

The man in charge of the young scholars considered Daniel’s refusal to eat the king’s food. However, the man was afraid to disobey the king. What if he gave the Hebrew men some other kind of food, and then they were not as strong and handsome as the rest of the students? Then, the king might be angry and cut off the head of the man who disobeyed him.

Daniel suggested a ten-day test. The Hebrew men would eat vegetables and drink water instead of sharing the king’s food and wine. The man agreed to try it. If the young men became weaker in ten days, he would insist they eat what the king ordered. The test proved that the Hebrew diet was best, so it was continued.

God wanted these young Hebrew men to be His witnesses in Babylon. He helped them become the best of the students. To Daniel, He gave a special ability to understand the messages that He sometimes gave in dreams. The king gave the final examination at the end of the three years of training. He found that the Hebrew men were not only the best of the students but also even wiser than the great scholars of Babylon. Daniel stayed in Babylon for the rest of his life. He grew to be an old man in Babylon.

It was not up to the royal courts of Babylon to decide what food could be eaten. Daniel knew that God’s reign was above all earthly kingdoms. He is the king, and even our bodies belong to Him.

“Know that the Lord is God. He made us, and we belong to him. We are his people, the sheep he tends.” [Psalm 100:3, ICB](#)

New Testament References to the Body

The New Testament does not contain specific food commands and yet the “body” is used many times to help us understand important concepts.

- Our bodies are to be used to glorify God ([1 Corinthians 6:12-20](#)).
- God’s Spirit lives within our bodies ([1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#)).
- Our lives (most versions translate this as “bodies”) are a living sacrifice to God ([Romans 12:1](#)).

- The church is the Body of Christ, and He is the head ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)).
- Individual Christians are part of one body, the body of Christ ([1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#)).

Way to Introduce the Story:

Provide some healthy and yummy food. As you share the food with the children, discuss the importance of a healthy diet. Talk about the fact that there were rules about food in the Old Testament. Jews were not allowed to eat some things (like pork). Think of why God had rules about food (health, cleanliness, no refrigerators, etc.) In today's story, we will learn about a young boy who always tried to obey God's laws about special foods.

The Story:

God repeatedly warned His people that He would not protect them from their enemies if they did not obey Him. One of the enemies was King Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the powerful country of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to destroy the special city of Jerusalem and the beautiful temple of God. Because the kings and many people did not obey God, He let King Nebuchadnezzar win.

King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem three times. The first time, he took many people as prisoners, including many young people. The second time, he captured the King and army and took 10,000 people as prisoners. Finally, on the third capture, King Nebuchadnezzar broke down the temple and destroyed the city of Jerusalem. He took away almost all the rest of the people. They all had to move to the country of Babylon. Now, God's people could not live in their own country. Bad things happened because most people had chosen not to obey God.

Not all the people were bad. Four good young Jewish men, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were taken as prisoners during the first capture. They were good men who loved God, obeyed His laws, worshipped Him, and prayed. They were also careful to obey God's rules about foods they could and could not eat. Now they were prisoners! They had to leave their parents and live far away in Babylon.

While these men lived in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar chose all the smartest and healthiest young prisoners to be his special helpers. Daniel and his three friends were chosen. The king wanted the prisoners to learn to like Babylon and to help the king. They were taken to the palace and taught all the laws of Babylon.

Their names were changed to Babylonian names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They learned sciences, maths, and all about the stars. While the men were learning, the king put an official in charge of them. He told the official to give the young men the best food in Babylon.

There was one very big problem. Daniel and his friends knew that the king's food was food God did not allow. The food had probably even been used in the worship of idols. If they ate the food, they would disobey God's law. Daniel told the king's officials they would not eat the king's food.

The official liked Daniel and his friends. He noticed that they were good young men and always tried their best. He did not want to make them eat the king's food, but he feared the king would get mad at him. Daniel had a good idea. He told the official to perform a test. Daniel and his friends would only eat vegetables and drink water for ten days. At the end of ten days, the official could judge to see if they were as healthy as the other young men at the palace.

Daniel and the other three men ate the vegetables and drank water for ten days. At the end of ten days, the official noticed that these four young men were healthier than all the other young men at the palace. From then on, he allowed them to eat the food God allowed. They did not have to eat the king's food.

At the end of the study time, the young men were brought before the king so he could test them with questions. The king decided that Daniel and his friends were the best of all the young men in the palace. They were wise and intelligent, ten times better than all the magicians and wise men in the entire kingdom. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego became wise men of the king's court. They always loved God and tried to obey His laws. Even though they were prisoners, God blessed and cared for them. It was not up to the royal courts of Babylon to decide what food could be eaten. Daniel knew that God's reign was above all earthly kingdoms. He is the king of the entire world; even our bodies belong to Him.

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#), or [click here to download the pictures to print](#).

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

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Review:

- What happened to Jerusalem after the kings all stopped obeying God? (It was destroyed, and the people were taken captive to Babylon)
- Who were the four young men chosen to live in the palace? (Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego)
- What were the young men training to become? (Workers in the King's government)
- Why did Daniel and his friends not want to eat the king's food or have the king's drinks? (It would make them unclean and break God's laws)
- What was the only kind of food and drink the young men had? (Vegetables and water)
- After Daniel and his friends ate vegetables and drank water for ten days, who was healthier, them or the men who ate the king's food? (Daniel and the other three Israelite men)
- What did the King's official do after the test, and he saw the young men were healthier than those who ate the king's food? (He let them keep eating vegetables and water instead of the king's food.)
- How did Daniel and his friends do when King Nebuchadnezzar tested them with questions? (They were ten times smarter than all the wise men in the kingdom)
- What do you think the official learned from Daniel and his friends?
- What did this story show you about God?

Reflection:

- What part of this story is most interesting to you?
- What kind of food do you think the King served?
- What do you think the eating area in the King's palace smelled and looked like?
- How do you think Daniel and his three friends felt about the king's official testing them to see if their diet made them healthier?
- If you were one of the Israelite men, would you have eaten the king's fancy food or only eaten vegetables?
- Daniel and his friends could have eaten what all the other young men were eating, but they didn't because they wanted to follow God's laws. What is something God asks you to do that might be different from how other people act?
- What is a food God made that makes you feel healthy?
- What is a food that makes you feel unwell?
- Why does taking care of our bodies honour God and please Him?
- How can you honour God by helping your body be healthy? (examples might include eating fresh produce, going on a walk or playing outside, sleeping enough, drinking water, etc.)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [Shake the Devil Off Song](#)
- [1-2-3 The Devil's After Me Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)
- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- Guide the children in preparing a healthy snack.
- Thank God for making our bodies, and then do some exercises and talk about how we can take care of God's gift. You might even try an exercise tape or take a walk.

- Daniel and his friends chose to obey God even when their parents were not with them. Talk about good things you would do even if your parents were not with you.
- Memorise 1 Corinthians 10:31. [Click here for ideas to help children memorise Scripture.](#)

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Make a poster depicting [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#). Cut and paste pictures from magazines depicting people exercising and eating healthy food.
- There were particular Old Testament Jewish laws about what food could and could not be eaten. Those laws are not found in the New Testament, but God is still concerned with how we treat our bodies. Make a poster depicting how we take care of the bodies God made. This could relate to food, exercise, harmful substances and more.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page with text \(Ministry Spark\)](#)
- [Vegetable flash cards to print \(megaworkbook.com\)](#)

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