

January 7  
Lesson 6 (NIV)

# A SINCERE

## FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 56

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1

### DANIEL 1:8-21

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>9</sup> Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, <sup>10</sup> but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”

<sup>11</sup> Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” <sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

<sup>15</sup> At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. <sup>16</sup> So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

<sup>17</sup> To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

<sup>18</sup> At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. <sup>20</sup> In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

<sup>21</sup> And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

### KEY VERSE

*Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.—Daniel 1:8*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the details of the first test that Daniel and his friends faced as captives in Babylon and how they responded to it.
2. Give examples of modern workplace situations that parallel those of the text.
3. Form a plan for responding to a workplace challenge that the model of the text addresses.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Worst-Case Scenarios
- B. Lesson Background

#### I. Maintain Values (DANIEL 1:8-10)

- A. Request Made (v. 8)  
“When in Rome, Do as the Romans”
- B. Request Granted (vv. 9, 10)

#### II. Offer Solutions (DANIEL 1:11-16)

- A. Limited Trial (vv. 11-14)
- B. Exemplary Results (vv. 15, 16)

### III. Work Diligently ([DANIEL 1:17-21](#))

#### A. Empowered by God ([vv. 17, 18](#))

*Jonah, Esther, or Daniel?*

#### B. Outperforming the Godless ([vv. 19-21](#))

### Conclusion

#### A. Strategy for Exiles

#### B. Prayer

#### C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Worst-Case Scenarios

In 1999, Joshua Piven and David Borgenicht authored *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook*, a guide to surviving the worst of all imaginable catastrophes. The book has sold over 10 million copies and inspired a series of related books, games, and even a television show.

While strategic planners regularly discuss how to react in extreme circumstances, they usually do not consider situations as extreme as those Piven and Borgenicht describe. Their book provides instructions for situations such as landing a plane when the pilot is incapacitated, defusing a bomb, escaping from quicksand, and surviving a shark attack.

Bad things do happen to good people. True, we may not have had to survive a shark attack or defuse a bomb, but we have all experienced crisis: the loss of a job, conflict with a family member, etc. There is much to learn from how an Old Testament prophet dealt with a crisis in his life.

### B. Lesson Background

The focus of this quarter's lessons is the twofold nature of faith as encompassing both belief and action. The unit of four lessons that begins with today's study is drawn from the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Daniel and his three friends lived in perilous times for Judah and its capital of Jerusalem. The "third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah," mentioned in [Daniel 1:1](#), was 605 BC. This was also the year when King Nebuchadnezzar came to power in Babylon. He ruled for 43 years.

The siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar noted in [Daniel 1:1](#) was the first of a series of excursions by Babylon into Judah, climaxed by the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 BC. (Note that the land of Babylon or Babylonia is also referred to as Chaldea, and the residents are called Chaldeans.)

Of course, it is vital to read what follows the account in [Daniel 1:1](#): "And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God" ([1:2](#)). This makes clear what all of Scripture proclaims: kings such as Nebuchadnezzar, as great as they may be or consider themselves to be, are ultimately under the reign of the truly "great King," the Lord ([Psalm 48:2](#)).

Part of the Babylonians' strategy in conquering territories such as Judah was to select individuals from those territories who showed significant potential for being schooled in the culture of the Babylonians. In the words of [Daniel 1:4](#), they were looking for

*young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.*

This practice was intended to replace the captives' cultural identity with that of the Babylonians. Among those taken from Jerusalem for this purpose were Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ([Daniel 1:6](#)). [Daniel 1:3](#) notes that these young men were drawn from the royal family and nobility of Judah.

One component of the reeducation of captives was that of changing their given names. In a culture where names were of great significance, such an action was intended to show the captives that their very identity had been changed. Thus Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah became Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, respectively ([Daniel 1:7](#)). The new names included references to fictitious Babylonian gods (compare [4:8](#)); they no longer reflect the name of the God of Judah.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Abednego Uh-bed-nec-go.

Azariah Az-uh-rye-uh.

Babylon Bab-uh-lun.

Babylonian Bab-ih-low-nee-un.

Belteshazzar Bel-tih-shazz-er.

Chaldeans Kal-dee-unz.

Cyrus Sigh-russ.

eunuchs you-nicks.

Gentiles Jen-tiles.

Hananiah Han-uh-nye-uh.

Jehoiakim Jeh-hoy-uh-kim.

Judean Joo-dee-un.

Meshach Me-shack.

Mishael Mish-a-el.

Nebuchadnezzar *Neb-yuh-kud-**nez**-er.*

Persian *Per-zhunz.*

Shadrach *Shay-drack* or *Shad-rack.*

It is interesting that while Daniel's three friends are referred to by their new names exclusively after [Daniel 2:17](#), Daniel himself, whose Hebrew name means "God is judge," is identified by both his old and new names together six times (see [Daniel 1:7](#); [2:26](#); [4:8, 19](#); [5:12](#); [10:1](#)). Some propose this to be a way of recognizing that Daniel's God remained in control in a pagan setting; but this theory does not explain why the same is not noted of Daniel's three friends, who serve the same God. Our lesson text begins with the first of a series of tests that Daniel and his friends faced regarding their loyalty to the true God—*their* God.

## I. Maintain Values

([DANIEL 1:8-10](#))

### A. Request Made ([v. 8](#))

#### **8a. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine,**

[Daniel 1:5](#) tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar "assigned [Daniel and his friends] a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service." However, Daniel has *resolved not to defile himself with* such provisions. Most likely there are one or two reasons that lead to Daniel's decision not to eat and drink what the king offers. First, the food may have been presented to Babylonian gods as part of a pagan ceremony (compare [1 Corinthians 8](#)). Second, the food may violate the regulations on clean and unclean foods given in the Law of Moses ([Leviticus 11](#)).

The reference to Daniel's resolve is noteworthy for indicating his steadfast devotion to his God. Daniel's captors can change his surroundings and his name, but they cannot touch his heart. That belongs to God alone.

### **"WHEN IN ROME, DO AS THE ROMANS"**

The above axiom is so familiar that we usually shorten it to just "When in Rome." This saying has its origin in antiquity, being a short paraphrase of advice to Augustine (AD 354-430) from Ambrose (AD 337-397). The longer, more precise version is this:

When I go to Rome, I fast on Saturday, but here [in Milan] I do not fast. On the same principle . . . observe the custom prevailing in whatever church you come to attend, if you desire neither to give offense by your conduct, nor to find cause of offense in another's.

The advice is to be understood in the context of how Christians saw fit to practice their faith with regard to matters of opinion in various locations (compare [Romans 14:5, 6](#)).

Modern culture has hijacked the axiom to justify accommodating oneself to whatever secular customs are practiced in a given location. So, for example, the "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" mind-set is taken to justify immoral behavior while visiting that city. But we are careful to note that Daniel didn't adopt an unthinking "when in Babylon, do as the Babylonians do" outlook when interacting with that pagan culture.

The issue that confronted Daniel also confronts us: Which of society's customs are appropriate to practice, and which are not? This is a question that must be asked and answered on a daily basis.

—C. R. B.

#### *What Do You Think?*

When was a time you honored a boundary to stay true to God's will? What did you learn from that experience that could help others?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Regarding tactfulness (example: [Judges 8:1-3](#)) vs. directness (example: [Judges 12:1-6](#))

Considering boundaries that you model for others to honor as well ([Ephesians 5:3-7](#); etc.) vs. boundaries of private conscience ([Romans 14:22](#); etc.)

#### **8b. and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.**

It is also to Daniel's credit that he goes through the proper channels to voice his concerns about his diet. He does not become obnoxious or defiant in his behavior; rather, he brings his concerns to *the chief official*.

Translations differ regarding this title, with some editions of the Bible being more specific in identifying this man as overseeing the palace eunuchs. This may indicate that Daniel and his friends were made eunuchs when brought to Babylon (compare [Isaiah 39:7](#)). Such was a common practice in ancient times. In other contexts the versions agree in translating the Hebrew word less specifically as "official(s)" or "officer(s)" (examples: [1 Samuel 8:15](#); [2 Kings 23:11](#)).

## B. Request Granted ([vv. 9, 10](#))

#### **9. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel,**

Here is additional evidence of the Lord's control (compare [Daniel 1:2](#)) as God honors the faithfulness of Daniel. This man's experience in a foreign land is thus very similar to Joseph's in Egypt ([Genesis 39:2-4, 20-23](#)).

**10. but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."**

The official is sensitive to the fact that he answers to King Nebuchadnezzar for his conduct. The pronouns *your* and *you* are plural in the Hebrew text, thus the official recognizes that Daniel speaks for his three friends. If these four do not eat from the king's table, their appearance may suffer—and so will the one in charge!

## II. Offer Solutions

(DANIEL 1:11-16)

### A. Limited Trial (vv. 11-14)

**11, 12. Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.**

To the individual *whom the chief official* has put in charge of Daniel and his friends, Daniel suggests an alternative diet for him and his friends. They are to be given *vegetables to eat and water to drink*. The exact meaning of the Hebrew word translated *vegetables* is uncertain since the word occurs only here in the Old Testament. Thus there is no other context with which to compare it. But the word seems to mean generally “things that are sown” as opposed to meat. Therefore *vegetables* is a reasonable translation. Since the time of training that Daniel and his friends are undergoing is three years (Daniel 1:5), a 10-day “trial run” on a vegetarian diet will not interfere with the overall program.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How should a Christian go about appealing an employer’s policy that goes against his or her Christian convictions?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Considering how to pray about the appeal
- Considering the medium of the appeal (personal discussion, e-mail, etc.)
- Considering the tone of the appeal
- Considering the basis of the appeal
- Other

**13. “Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.”**

At the end of the 10 days, the person in charge can examine the results, specifically the *appearance* of the four young men, comparing their appearance with those who have eaten of *the royal food*. He can *treat* the four men as the results dictate. If their appearance is inferior to that of the others, that will be sufficient evidence to end the experiment.

**14. So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.**

Daniel’s tactful, polite approach is persuasive, so the test commences. Tactfulness seems to be an important personality characteristic of Daniel (compare Daniel 2:14; Judges 8:1-3; contrast Judges 12:1-6).

### B. Exemplary Results (vv. 15, 16)

**15. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.**

It may seem odd that Daniel and his friends could have looked *healthier and better nourished*, following a 10-day diet of nothing but vegetables and water, than those who have eaten *the royal food*. This statement thus speaks favorably of the four men’s overall appearance without suggesting that they gained weight.

**16. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.**

God has already caused the foreign officials to look with favor on Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:9), and it seems that he has done so again. *The guard* honors his promise and allows the four men to continue with their nutrition plan.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What did you learn from an experience when you saw an attempt to honor God backfire?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding a “holier than thou” witness
- Regarding misunderstanding of God’s desires
- Regarding an inconsistent witness
- Other

## III. Work Diligently

(DANIEL 1:17-21)

### A. Empowered by God (vv. 17, 18)

**17a. To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.**

Here is another sign of God’s special blessing and care for the four young men from Judah. Daniel 1:4 says that the Babylonians’ intention is to teach the young captives their “language and literature.” But Daniel and his three friends have an additional teacher: God.

### *JONAH, ESTHER, OR DANIEL?*

Someone observed that the fundamental question of theology has always been how the church can present the gospel in the thought-forms of its surrounding culture as winsomely as possible without giving up the central core of the gospel. Modern answers to the question have been “all over the map,” as they say. But we

also see wide variety in the Bible as various devout people react differently to cultural influences.

At one extreme was Jonah. He wanted absolutely nothing to do with the culture into which God sent him to preach. And Jonah did his best (or his worst) to avoid his mission. He goes down in history as the only preacher disappointed that his preaching was successful (see [Jonah 3:6-4:3](#))! At the other extreme was Esther, who came close to allowing the context of her new culture to blind her to her obligation to her own people ([Esther 2:7-18](#); [4:9-14](#)).

Daniel and his friends stand between these extremes. They were willing to be instructed in the language and ways of their captors ([Daniel 1:4](#)). But to be instructed about something does not necessarily imply personally adopting the values that stand behind cultural practices. The fact that these men ended up with the approval of both God and King Nebuchadnezzar indicates that the four walked this tightrope perfectly. So . . . how are your tightrope-walking skills these days?

—C. R. B.

BEING A PERSON OF FAITH IN A HOST

COOPERATI

PROPOSE CONSTRUCTIVE SOLU

DANIEL 1

Sheet 3—Winter 2017, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lesson 6. Ask learners if they see the problem with this visual (the gears are locked). Then ask for constructive solutions to the problem.

What Do You Think?

How would you use [Daniel 1:17a, 20](#), if at all, to counsel a student who is worried about being corrupted by secular higher education?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding the role of humility
- Regarding the role of discernment
- Regarding the role of academic excellence
- Comparing and contrasting with other opportunities to engage culture

**17b. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.**

Daniel demonstrates that he *could understand visions and dreams of all kinds* on two occasions for King Nebuchadnezzar (see [Daniel 2:31-45](#); [4:19-27](#)). Daniel will also experience visions that will leave him deeply shaken, even sickened ([7:15, 28](#); [8:27](#); [10:8, 16, 17](#)). In one instance, the Lord withholds understanding ([8:26, 27](#)).

**18. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.**

The note that *the end of the time set by the king* is at hand means that the Hebrew men have completed the three-year training and education regimen of [Daniel 1:5](#). This is the time when the king will grant his approval; however, Daniel and his friends already have approval from one who has greater authority than Nebuchadnezzar, that being the approval of God himself ([Daniel 1:9, 17](#)). On the identity of *the chief official*, see commentary on [1:8b](#), above.

## B. Outperforming the Godless (vv. 19-21)

**19. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.**

The king interacts with all of those who have gone through the training program. No individual or group is more distinguished than *Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah*. Perhaps the continued use of their Hebrew names, after being given new names in [Daniel 1:7](#), is meant to highlight the fact that the God whose name is a part of their given names is the source of the wisdom that has caused them to excel in a pagan environment. The king can change their names, but he can do nothing to hinder the power and influence of their God.

These four men now enter *the king's service*. A similar expression is used of David's service to King Saul ([1 Samuel 16:21, 22](#)). The ultimate service of the four still belongs to the King of kings, however.

*What Do You Think?*

What have you seen Christians do to improve work relationships? Which of those actions are models for to emulate?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- In contexts of paid employment
- In contexts of volunteer work

**20. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.**

The four Judean captives distinguish themselves from their peers. The expression *ten times better* is a way of saying that they are far more competent than any of the other men who come before the king. Pagan *magicians and enchanters* possess their own methods (compare [Exodus 7:11, 22](#); [8:7, 18](#); [Acts 8:9-12](#)). But as [verse 17](#) has already informed us, God has given Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah the edge over everyone else.

Consider again the parallel with Joseph in the book of Genesis. He too was taken to a foreign land (against his will) and there demonstrated a wisdom in interpreting dreams that the Egyptian magicians and wise men did not possess ([Genesis 41:8, 15, 16](#)).

**21. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.**

This final verse in our text calls attention to the duration of Daniel's service on foreign soil. He will outlast not only the great King Nebuchadnezzar but the Babylonian Empire itself, which will fall to the Persians in 539 BC. Daniel will then continue his exemplary service under *Cyrus*, the ruler who will issue during his *first year* the decree allowing those Jews who wish to do so to go back home to Judah ([2 Chronicles 36:22, 23](#)).

Daniel's three friends are mentioned again when they are promoted to higher positions as "administrators over the province of Babylon" ([Daniel 2:49](#)). We will also meet them in [chapter 3](#) in the account of the "blazing furnace," the subject of next week's study.

## Conclusion

### A. Strategy for Exiles

A change of setting became very real and intense for Daniel and friends. Their status changed from being part of a majority in Judah to being a clear minority in Babylon.

These four young men could have viewed their new status from a primarily negative perspective in never again being able to serve God as they once did. But they chose instead to see their circumstances more in terms of an open door to honor God before pagans.

That more positive perspective produced within Daniel and his companions a strategy that we as exiles who serve Jesus in alien territory (compare [1 Peter 2:11](#)) can apply. Daniel, while expressing his dislike for the foods offered by the king, used the proper channels to present his objections. Daniel was not disrespectful toward those in authority, and neither should we be ([Romans 13:1-5](#); [1 Peter 2:12-19](#)). Our intention to "obey God rather than human beings" ([Acts 5:29](#)) does not mean that we must set out to create hostility. Taking a strong stand need not mean being belligerent.

### B. Prayer

Our Father, guide us in following the example of Daniel as we exhibit tact and grace under pressure. May we emulate our ultimate example, Jesus, who was filled with grace and truth. Grant us your Spirit's power in our spheres of influence. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Godly conviction combined with diplomacy  
can overcome many crises.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

As a class, browse through news headlines (either from newspapers or online) to find 10-12 examples of different types of crises. Examples can range from financial crises to political crises to medical crises to safety crises, and so on. Write the headlines in a place where everyone can see them. Then, as a class, discuss the crises and whom they affect. Then work together to number the headlines in order from most disastrous to least.

*Alternative.* Distribute pens or pencils and copies of the “In Case of Emergency” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in small groups to match emergency situations with the best responses.

After either activity, transition to the Bible study by saying, “Bad things happen to good people. We have all experienced a crisis in our lives—loss of a job, conflict with a family member, or an unexpected move. Let’s learn how an Old Testament prophet dealt with a crisis in his life.”

### Into the Word

Prior to class, prepare grocery bags with the items described below. If you can’t gather the actual items, replace them with pictures or written descriptions. Read [Daniel 1:8-21](#) as a class. Then divide students into three groups, giving each group one of the bags. Have groups unpack the bags and follow the instructions on the index cards you’ve prepared as described below. After several minutes, let groups share the questions they’ve been given and report to the class. Allow further discussion.

**Group 1**—Give this group a bag containing a bag of sugar and a box of sugar substitute/artificial sweetener. The card should say, “Read [Daniel 1:8-10](#) and discuss: If Daniel had decided to SUBSTITUTE his diet for the one offered by the king, what other things might he have been tempted to embrace while at the palace?”

**Group 2**—Give this group a grocery bag containing some type of cleaning solution. The card should say, “Read [Daniel 1:11-16](#) and discuss: Rather than defiantly refusing what was offered him, Daniel suggested a SOLUTION. Why was this so important?”

**Group 3**—Give this group a grocery bag containing women’s cosmetic foundation. The card should say, “Read [Daniel 1:17-21](#) and discuss: Because of their faithfulness, God blessed Daniel and his three companions with remarkable wisdom and knowledge. How did these things lay a FOUNDATION for David as he faced future trials?”

*Alternative.* Distribute pens or pencils, paper, and copies of the “Rearview Mirror” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work individually or in small groups to prepare a monologue from Daniel’s perspective. Invite volunteers to share the monologues with the class.

After either activity, say, “People often find themselves confronted by contradictory requirements from different sources of authority. How do we resolve such conflicts? Daniel’s active faith combined with tact helped him resolve his conflict and remain obedient to God.”

### Into Life

Say, “Daniel saw God’s faithfulness throughout his life, and it strengthened him. As adults, we have a perspective and a foundation that younger believers may not yet have.” Give examples of crises that young believers might be facing (parents divorcing, trouble at school, uncertain future, injury or illness, etc.). Discuss ways that mature Christians could offer encouragement and support. Challenge students to commit to impacting the lives of young believers through their own knowledge, experience, and faith.