

Resolved

The First Wise Man, Part 1

Daniel 1:1-21

I have read that 45% of Americans typically set New Year's Resolutions – nearly one out of every adult you meet has made a little list and stuck it somewhere on his computer or desk.

From what I've read, half of the resolutions made by people have to do with self-improvement or education.

38% set resolutions specifically related to their weight – although we're not told in this survey, I'm pretty sure none of them wanted more of it – but less.

34% made resolutions regarding debt – and on that one, I assume everyone wanted less of it, not more.

31% made some sort of resolution regarding personal relationships.¹

And those were the big ticket items.

I personally think the making of resolutions is an excellent application of Proverbs 4:26 where we're told to give careful consideration to the path of our feet. Think about where you're going – and where you want to be.

It's an exercise worth doing, prayerfully, thoughtfully.

Many of you are aware that as a young man, Jonathan Edwards began his own personal list of resolutions. He would later become a key leader in the Great Awakening – a time of great revival in America – during the 1700's.

Beginning in 1723, when he was 20 years of age, he began composing his list.

Let me read a couple of them:

- Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.

That pretty much takes care of everything, doesn't it? I mean what more do you need?

He would go on for about a year, writing 70 resolutions in all, which served as a rudder over the course of his life.

Because Jonathan Edwards had such a realistic view of his personal sanctification and growth, he added several along these lines – here's one:

- Resolved, never to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be.

And again:

- Resolved, if I shall fall and grow dull, so as to neglect to keep these Resolutions, to repent of all I can remember, when I come to myself again.

Here's another realistic, humble admission that led him to add another resolution – he writes:

- Resolved, always to do what I shall wish I had done when I see someone else doing it.

One more: and I think this was a key to his success – Jonathan Edwards made a resolution to review his resolutions –

- Resolved, to inquire every night, as I am going to bed, where I have been negligent, what sin I have committed, and where I have denied myself (that is, where I've done the *right* thing): [and to do so] at the end of every week, [every] month and [every] year.

In other words, every night he'd run through a mental accountability; but at the end of every week, month and year, he'd pull out the list.

Maybe one of our problems is that we so soon forget what we've resolved.

I found it interesting in this survey summary I read, that only half of the people who make resolutions are keeping them, one month later.

Only 40% are keeping them 6 months later.

And this survey recorded that only 19% are sticking to them 24 months later.ⁱⁱ

I want to introduce to you, in our new series of studies, another man who made some resolutions while he was still a young man.

His resolutions will place him squarely in the middle of conflict – in fact, they will eventually threaten his life.

Because of his resolutions, he will live his life in the minority . . . with only a few personal friends; he will face incredible pressure to conform his entire life.

If you rolled back the calendar to around 600 years before the birth of Christ, Egypt and Babylon would have been the two superpowers on the planet.

In the year 605 B.C. a prince by the name of Nebuchadnezzar won a decisive victory over Egypt gaining control of the land of Israel. Later that same year, his father, Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon died, and Nebuchadnezzar rushed home to claim his throne.ⁱⁱⁱ

Biblical history records how, along the way, he carried captives from Jerusalem. He also carried sacred vessels from the temple of God to place them in the temple of his chief god, Marduk.

Verses 1 and 2 of Daniel chapter 1 inform us that this is exactly what he did.

He wanted to express his thanks to Marduk for allowing him to conquer this land; but he also wanted to humiliate Jehovah, the obviously inferior God of the Hebrews.

It'll be a few chapters later where Nebuchadnezzar will discover that Jehovah really didn't have any rivals and secondly, that Nebuchadnezzar's victory had actually been prophesied a century earlier by Isaiah as part of God's plan.

God intended to discipline His people through this period of captivity for their persistent rebellion and idolatry.

I like the way Warren Wiersbe put it as he introduced his commentary on Daniel – he said that God evidently would rather have His people living in captivity in a pagan land, than living like pagans in the Holy land.^{iv}

And so, like Alexander the Great after him, Nebuchadnezzar adopted the policy of using the most promising young people of his new empire in government service, no matter what their nationality.^v

He wanted the best and brightest minds – not just captured, but commissioned.

Most Bible historians agree that somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 young people were specifically taken to Babylon for this very purpose.

Verse 3 informs us that the young people were from the royal line of Judah, sons of nobles and leaders from the land of Israel.

In verse 4 they are called “youths” – the Hebrew word *yeladim* – which most agree put them at 13 to 17 years of age.^{vi}

We're given 6 brief descriptions of these young men.

They were:

1. Without physical defect – in other words, Nebuchadnezzar only wanted flawless physical specimens in his court.
2. They are also described as good-looking

Just as Israel chose a king based on physical qualities alone, Nebuchadnezzar was all about image.

3. But you'll notice they also had to be ***intelligent in every branch of wisdom.***

He didn't want good looking guys who couldn't spell – they had to be bright too.

4. They also had to be endowed with understanding – literally they had to be “knowers of knowledge”.^{vii}
5. Further, these young men had to be discerning – this is a reference to being able to gather data and correlate facts and come to the right conclusion.
6. Finally, we're told here in ***verse 4*** that they had to be able ***to stand in the king's court.***

This was a reference to their bearing, their poise, and their manners even. I couldn't help but chuckle – how well had these teenage boys learned their table manners – which would be interesting in this new culture especially.

My wife and I found out in our recent trip to Geneva, Switzerland that manners can be entirely opposite the ones you use at home.

We were told by the pastor and his wife over supper that in Switzerland you're supposed to put both hands on the table – and elbows are fine too. None of this one hand in the lap.

And this was really strange – you weren't supposed to put your bread on your plate, but directly on the table. In fact, to put it on your plate implied to your host that their tablecloth was dirty – so, hands and elbows and bread crumbs on the table.

I remember growing up, if one of us four boys had our hands on the table, my mother had the ability to reach over with her spoon or fork and with lightning speed – whack us on the knuckles.

We never saw it coming.

Why couldn't my mother have been raised in Geneva?

Obviously, Daniel and these others are going to learn a host of new manners and customs and social graces.

But they evidently showed a bearing that was both gracious and teachable.

And if these youths had all 6 qualities, the last part of verse 4 informs us that they were inducted into the Babylonian Royal University.

They weren't given slave duty, they were given scholarships.

I want to proceed through the rest of this chapter by showing you 4 new, life changing events that have – or are about to – impact and change and challenge the mind and heart and life of Daniel and his friends.

Out of it all will come brand new resolutions that will mark Daniel for rest of his life.

1. The first life changing event is that Daniel is taken to a new world.



http://joseph_berrigan.tripod.com/ancientbabylon/id14.html

It's difficult for us to imagine the impact of moving from the land of Judah and his boyhood home to the greatest, wealthiest, most beautiful place known to the ancient world.

The hanging gardens around the terraced palace grounds had been one of the seven wonders of the

ancient world. Highly trained staff tended the gardens 24 hours a day.

The River Euphrates flowed through the city and the banks of the river inside the city proper were beautifully walled and tiled with steps leading down to the water's edge like some Venetian city.

The main entrance of this capital city was also one of the wonders of the ancient world.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ishtar_Gate_at_Berlin_Museum.jpg

It was called the gate of Ishtar, named after their chief goddess who was considered the Queen of Heaven.

That very gate has been excavated and rebuilt in the Berlin Museum with its beautiful blue and gold tiles, with dragons and lions crafted in patterns of colored tiles.

His predecessors had used sun dried bricks, but Nebuchadnezzar used fired bricks, which survived in that arid climate and to this day, though nearly 3,000 years old, these excavations still stun the imagination and reflect the beauty and the wealth and the power of this ancient kingdom.

In fact, Daniel would have walked through this very gate of Ishtar; no doubt his heart racing; perhaps hiding behind his eyes would have been thoughts of utter amazement and at the same time total hopelessness.

If there was ever a time to doubt the apparently defeated God of Judah, it was now. If there was ever a time to wonder about the promises of God's kingdom, it was now.

In fact, to add to the propaganda of their immediate indoctrination, this party of noble captives no doubt would have paused by the gate so that an inscription, written in hieroglyphs, could be read to these teenagers from Judah. The inscription had been installed by Nebuchadnezzar himself and, translated into English it read in part:

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, the pious prince appointed by the will of Marduk . . . of prudent deliberation, having learned to embrace wisdom; who fathomed the godly beings and pays

reverence to their majesty; the untiring Governor . . . the wise, the humble . . . yea right – the first-born of Nabopolassar, the King of Babylon, am I.”

They would have then walked through the gate and down the main boulevard, called the Processional Way; it was 150 feet wide – nearly twice the width of this auditorium – designed for two way traffic with a landscaped median in between – much like Tryon Road just outside –with sidewalks on either side of the road.



<http://www.diggingsonline.com/pages/rese/arts1/2003/babylon.htm>

These captives would have walked alongside tiled walls that were on both sides of the Processional Way – the walls have also been excavated and they were equally stunning in beauty.

They were covered with mosaics of palm trees stretching 30 feet high with a band of lions marching in single file underneath the palm trees.



http://www.bible-history.com/babylonia/BabyloniaStriding_Lion.htm

A closer view of the bottom of these tiled walls and you can see how the lions were designed to look like they were marching down the boulevard in splendor and confidence. Each lion was 7 feet long, set against a background of dark blue tiles.

Excavations reveal that their coloring actually varied; some lions had white fur and yellow manes, while others had yellow fur and red manes.

It would have been a stunning display of wealth and power.

Nebuchadnezzar was somewhat obsessed with lions. He collected them along with other wild animals to show off his power and to whom he could periodically feed people he didn't like.

These lions are going to make an appearance in Daniel's life – although he doesn't know it at the time – some 70 years later.

But can you just imagine young Daniel and his friends, walking through that massive gate and down this boulevard?

This wasn't Kansas anymore . . . this wasn't little Jerusalem, this was Babylon the Great.

Welcome to your new world.

2. You'll notice in *verse 4* that they not only have a new home, they're about to begin a new education.

The king orders Ashpenaz, the headmaster, to begin a 3 year university program – it's a crash course taught by the top tutors.

Notice the last part of *verse 4 again; they are to be taught the literature and the language of the Chaldeans.*

Obviously the purpose of their education was to transform these Jews into Babylonians.^{viii}

They would have been inducted into the Babylonians mythologies of creation, the flood, the origin of mankind and plurality of gods.

They would have been taught by Chaldeans – the cream of Babylonian society.

These were the wise men of old; the priestly caste who trained royalty crowned kings; they were the diviners, the magicians, the elite educators of philosophy, astrology, architecture, agriculture, history, law and linguistics.^{ix}

And their goal here was quite simple – To turn these backward, monotheistic Hebrews into polytheistic believers at best, atheists at worst.

Much like the educational system of our own culture, built on humanism and atheism, many professors have as their chief end the destruction of what they consider to be the crude, ignorant simplistic crutch of Christianity.

I remember one college student telling me some time ago that her professor openly admitted that one of his goals was to destroy the faith of Christians in his classroom.

Like Daniel, our students are bombarded with both truths and errors.

That doesn't mean you can't get a degree from a secular university – but it does mean you'd better learn like you eat cherries – you swallow the good stuff and spit out the seeds.

Just last week I watched a program about planet earth – I love to watch those kinds of shows that reveal the amazing creation of God. But I might as well watch it with the volume turned down because the hosts of the show completely miss the point.

One woman was gushing in amazement about how planet earth was just so perfectly suited to support all of the life forms. She talked about the fact that we're just the right distance from the sun so as not to be fried or frozen.

She then said, and the amazing thing about our planet is the immense amount of water covering most of our planet which is an integral part of supporting life as we know it . . . *but* we still don't know where the water came from.

The camera shifted to a man standing on the edge of a lake that began to explain the likelihood that millions of years ago earth was bombarded by thousands of asteroids and each of them was carrying water, which effectively filled up our lakes and oceans.

Obviously even atheists need to come up with some kind of answer to origins, right? You can't fault them for trying – mankind really wants to know where he came from!

Up until now, Daniel has been taught creationism from the inspired record of Genesis; that's all about to change.

The Babylonians could say, "Look, we've got our theories too – we've even got a Tree of Life and a flood and a pantheon of gods – we know we didn't evolve – our gods made us."

And our gods are obviously more powerful than your one God" it would be now.

3. These Jewish young men were thrust into a new world; a new education and they were even given, thirdly, new names.

All part of the psychological and spiritual reprogramming; and was this a clever tool.

Notice *verse 7. Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah Shadrach; to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.*

Their original Hebrew names had been given to them at birth to reflect the glory of God. Now, their new names are intended to remind them, every time they hear their name called, that their God is as good as dead.

Daniel means "God is my judge"; Belteshazzar is a name that begins with the name of Babylon's chief deity – Bel. The latter part of the name means either prince or, perhaps, protected by.^x

Either way, Daniel is now named in honor of the power of Bel and his name that glorified the power of Elohim is forever gone.

Hananiah means, "God is gracious". His name is changed to Shadrach – "Illumined by the sun god".

Again, this was designed to directly contradict the meaning of his original name – "Under the gracious care of God" to "Under the enlightening care of the sun god."

Mishael's name announced, "Who is like God?" His name is changed to Meshach – "Who is like Venus" – the goddess of sensual love?"^{xi}

Finally, Azariah's name, which meant, "The Lord is my helper" was changed to Abed-nego – "I worship Nego – the god of wisdom."^{xii}

And wouldn't they be wondering by now?

Were our Jewish names for real? Was it all make-believe? Is our God the true God? Is He gracious . . . wise . . . all powerful . . . able to care for us?

Doesn't look like it!

Imagine the pressure to throw it all away in this new world – being tutored in new ways – daily reminded that Jerusalem and God were distant things of the past every time they were called by their new name.

Add to that, a fourth new event.

4. A first ever for them – we'll call it new temptations

Because they were.

Now the rest of chapter 1 basically deals with this one issue – will they eat the food from the king's table and drink his wine.

What's wrong with that?

The key verse to understanding this is *verse 8* – in fact, if you want to summarize Daniel's life with one verse – here it is – get *verse 8* and you get Daniel!

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.

In other words, Daniel and his friends met these new temptations with a brand new resolution.

Resolved: never to defile myself with food and drink from the King's table . . . and that goes for anything else the King is trying to pawn off on us.

But back to food here – what's wrong with it?

The food included unclean meat that the Jews knew was forbidden under the existing laws of Moses.

Imagine the buffet line was prepared at the Royal Academy for these hungry student's first ever banquet lunch and man, they'd never seen so much food in their lives; pork products, shellfish, meat offered to the idols of the king . . . surely in this new world it's okay to dig in – evidently all the other Jewish teenagers were.

Hey Daniel – you got to taste some of this honey baked ham . . . you got to try some of that shrimp salad over there – is God good or what?^{xiii}

And what about the wine?

Historians tell us that the King's wine was poured out first as an offering to their gods and to drink was to tacitly acknowledge their gods and participate in their pagan feast.^{xiv}

Daniel and three other teenagers wouldn't touch it. They sat there with their stomachs growling in protest.

They've never had to say no to any of this before. In their homeland, if they ever smelled bacon frying in the air, someone was in deep trouble. They had never been offered a ham sandwich before.

They had never needed to say "no".

And if there was ever a time when it seemed *right* to say "yes", it would have been now.

Maybe you are facing brand new temptations. They've just cropped up recently. Maybe it's the temptation of power in some promotion; flattery, criticism, money, laziness, lust . . . as Spurgeon wrote, all you did was look out your window and a brand new corruption sprang into existence.

Brand new stuff . . .

Daniel and his friends resolved to say "no".

So now the University President is all in a flutter. He can't have 4 starving students on his hands . . . the king will have his head.

And that's when Daniel offers a compromise to the headmaster in *verse 12, Please test your servants for 10 days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. 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.*

Here's the test – just give us vegetables to eat for 10 days.

Vegetables – from *zero'im* – garden plants.^{xv}

Lettuce and lima beans – oh man . . . lima beans are sawdust covered with thin cardboard, right? Well I think they are. And green peas.

This was a plan I would never have ever conceived of.

When our children were growing up, my wife would slip a can of green peas into a casserole and after dinner, on my plate, the casserole would have disappeared but there'd be a little pile of green peas left behind – they did *not* get raptured . . . because they are unbelievers.

My wife would say, "Honey, you're being a bad example to the kids." And I'd say, "They'll get over it."

I hope they did!

Consider the fact that these are teenage guys . . . they're always hungry . . . they don't eat, they graze.

After the third day they're probably saying to Daniel, "What were you thinking?" Why not 10 days of lasagna? 10 days of breadsticks and Alfredo sauce? Who wants to dismiss right now and go to Olive Garden – this is a trick question.

I want you to notice something miraculous – *verse 15. At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food.*

You go on a vegetable and salad diet to *lose* weight, not gain weight. You're not going to gain weight eating salad.

Don't miss this – after 10 days they were *fatter* than all those kids putting down shrimp and pork and bread and cheese and wine and desserts that we can't even imagine.

You see, God was already at work . . . vindicating their godly resolution.

If you have any doubt about the working of God behind the scenes, notice that *verse 17 tells us how God was also giving them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.*

Well, graduation day arrives in *verse 18. Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them . . . 3 years are up . . . verse 19, the king personally talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service.*

The King personally interviewed each student, and at the end of his interview with each candidate, the King personally hired these four young men into his own cabinet of leaders.

The stage is set . . . God has his young ambassadors now deeply embedded in the kingdom of Babylon where they will soon begin making a difference for His name and glory.

Let me offer three observations from the example of Daniel and his friends – before we dash out of here and go eat something we probably shouldn't.

1. Resolving to follow Christ means that you refuse to allow your culture to rewrite your character.

Ever thought about how easy it would have been for these teenagers to rationalize in their new home?

All of them will – except four of them.

Renald Showers commentary provoked my thinking along these lines. He wrote, they could have rationalized by telling themselves, “Under normal circumstances God’s law is to be obeyed, but these aren’t normal circumstances.”

Or they could have rationalized, “God is to blame for this – if He hadn’t put us in this awful predicament, we wouldn’t have to break His law.”

They could have said, “If we disobey the king, it might cost us our lives and in God’s value system, the preservation of life is of greater consequence than obeying Him.”

Or they could have justified their compromise and sin by saying, “If we eat the king’s food and drink his wine, we’ll be placed in government posts and think of the great testimony and impact we can have for God in such an influential position.”^{xvi}

I love Jonathan Edwards Resolution # 61; Resolved, That I will not give way to that listlessness which I find relaxes my mind from being fully fixed on my [conviction] . . . whatever excuse I may have for it.

He cuts to the heart of the matter doesn't he? The truth is, we can all find excuses and justification for just about anything!

Perhaps you're thinking, “C'mon, it's just food . . . it's such a small thing . . . what's wrong with a little compromise . . . its lunch time.”

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus Christ never said, “Whoever can trusted in big things can be trusted with small things.” He actually said,

“Whoever can be trusted with small things, can be trusted with big things.” (Matthew 25)

Resolving to follow Christ means you refuse to allow your culture to rewrite your character.

In other words, a new *home* does not have to change your *heart*.

Secondly:

2. Resolving to follow Christ means that you choose to follow God without any guarantees.

Don't miss this. There wasn't a voice whispering in their ear,

- if you don't eat that food, I'll make sure you get hired by the king;
- if you obey Me, I'll make sure you graduate valedictorian;
- if you stand for truth, I'll make sure you get ahead in life.”

No voice from heaven . . . there were no angelic messengers . . . no guarantee preceding their resolution.

And don't ever forget, Daniel will *never* return home again.

One more . . .

3. Resolving to follow Christ means that you refuse to make the multitude your model.

For the most part, Daniel and his friends will stand alone. They refused to be conformed to their world . . . to follow the crowd.

It's interesting to me though, that *verse 19* implies that these four young men were the only ones who got a government post after all.

They made their resolution . . . and God determined their occupation . . . and instead of being changed by Babylon – they would change Babylonians – from the King down – for the glory and honor of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/18/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Stephen Shapiro, *“Interesting New Year’s Resolution Statistics,”* Stephen Shapiro’s 24/7 (stephenshapiro.com – 12-11-08)
- ii John C. Norcross, *“Addictive Behaviors,”* U.S. News & World Report, 1/16/89
- iii Renald E. Showers, *The Most High God* (The Friends of Israel, 1982), p. 1
- iv Warren W. Wiersbe, *Daniel: Be Resolute* (Victor Books, 2000), p. 12
- v Frank E. Gaebelien, General Editor, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 7* (Regency, 1985), p. 33
- vi John MacArthur, *An Uncompromising Life* (Word of Grace, 1988), p. 19
- vii Ibid, p. 20
- viii Wiersbe, p. 14
- ix John Phillips, pp. 31 & 238
- x Showers, p. 4
- xi Phillips, p. 33
- xii Ibid, p. 34
- xiii Adapted from Phillips, p. 37
- xiv MacArthur, p. 26
- xv The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, p. 36
- xvi Renald Showers, p. 6