

Daniel 1

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

³Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴young 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. ⁵The king assigned them 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.

⁶Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. ⁸But 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.

⁹Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰but 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."

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

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

¹⁷To 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.

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

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

Introduction

Daniel is a prophetic book centered around four followers of God who lived out their faith in some extremely difficult situations. It’s important to understand the context in which they lived in order to better understand how they followed God and proclaimed God’s message. The book of Daniel opens with a brief account of how God’s people were taken into captivity by Babylon, an evil and anti-God nation.

It was a shocking and heart-breaking experience for the Jewish people to be overtaken by an ungodly nation. It likely rocked (maybe destroyed) the faith of many believers, but it was also in this context that Daniel and his friends deeply committed and connected to God. The first chapter of Daniel doesn't give much context on this, but the events at the end of 2 Chronicles immediately precede chapter one of Daniel. Let's consider both to better understand the context. Then, let's consider the implications of the actions of Daniel and his friends and how it affects our view of God and how we are to live today.

Discussion Questions

1. When have you spent time in a foreign country or different culture than your own? What emotions did you have when faced with the differences in culture, language, food, traditions, norms, etc.?

Read vv. 1-8.

2. What is the background information we learn about God's people at this time? Who are the Babylonians? Who allowed or caused God's people to be taken into captivity?
3. Read 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 for more background information. What do you learn about God from these verses? Why were the people of God put into exile through the overtaking of the Babylonians?
4. What kind of emotions do you think the Jewish people are feeling in captivity? How would you imagine Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are feeling toward God?
5. In the Jewish custom, names held significant meaning and purpose. Why do you think Daniel and his friends accept having their names changed, but do not accept eating the royal food and wine?

6. *Apply:* What things have you had to refuse or give up in order to walk more closely with God? What things do you need to refuse or change in your life to walk more with God?

Read vv. 9-21

7. How did Daniel approach and interact with the Babylonian guards and officials? Considering the circumstances, why is this especially outstanding?
8. What kind of “test” does Daniel ask to have? What are the results?
9. How do you see God working “behind the scenes” in this story? How does God help these godly men spiritually, but also practically?
10. *Apply:* In the last month, how have you personally seen God working on your behalf and helping you in your day-to-day life?
11. How were Daniel and his friends being used as examples and messengers of God?
12. If God really was sending Daniel and his friends into the Babylonian world to proclaim the glory of God, why do you think there is no indication that Daniel or his friends spoke about God during their three years of training time?
13. *Apply:* Verse 17 says, “God gave [them] knowledge and understanding of all kinds...” How do we see this promise fulfilled in Jesus? (Hint: Look at Colossians 2:2-3) Do you experience this in your life daily?

Read John 17:15-18

14. Summarize Jesus’ prayer for His followers. How did Daniel and his friends model these commands?
15. *Apply:* What does it mean to be sanctified by the truth? Daniel was careful to not do anything to defile himself before God—in what areas do you need God to sanctify you?

16. *Apply:* Jesus says, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” How do you need to view yourself more as being sent by God into this world? What steps do you need to take to more practically represent Jesus in the places God has put you in?

Considerations and Synopsis

The book of Daniel opens with a brief account of how Judah (God’s “chosen” nation) was taken into captivity by Babylon. The important thing to understand is that God was judging Judah. By allowing a wicked nation to subdue them, in response to years of Jewish sin and idolatry, His judgement was both swift and dumbfounding for many Jews. However, this was warned of by the prophets repeatedly. To further understand the reasons behind this captivity and why God allowed this to happen, look at the end of Second Chronicles. The book of Daniel picks up immediately following the events of 2 Chronicles 36:15-17:

“The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians...”

God tried and tried again to get his people to turn back to him, but they continually mocked God and rebelled against Him. So God appointed the king of the Babylonians, King Nebuchadnezzar, to overtake and enslave the Jewish people. The Babylonians were written about in Scripture as evil people who did not follow the one true God. To have these people overtake “God’s people” would have been especially heartbreaking for every Jewish believer.

Can you imagine what Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah must have been feeling? The God they follow had seemingly abandoned them. It seemed that God wasn't keeping up with His end of the bargain. They'd been taken from all that was familiar-- their home, their land, their families, their traditions, their religious customs--and they became slaves to an ungodly king and evil kingdom. The temple, where God dwelled and where they practiced their faith, had been destroyed. They must have been feeling shocked, upset with God, frightened, and angry towards their captors. How could they possibly carry on emotionally, continue to live out their faith, or even consider representing God's love and message to those around them? Yet, that's exactly what they did.

Holiness: Not of this World

In Babylon, Daniel and his friends were given the role of being in the king's service. They went into training so that they were physically and intellectually fit for this service. For three years they had to learn the language, literature, and ways of the Babylonians. Basically, they were being indoctrinated and propagandized into the ways of their captors. This became even more true when their names were changed and when they were required to eat the royal food and wine.

Why did Daniel "resolve" to not eat the royal food and wine, but was willing to learn the culture of the Babylonians and even have his name changed? At first glance, it seems astonishing that he would agree to have his name changed. In the Jewish custom, names held deep meaning and purpose. Names were used to secure the solidarity of family ties, communicate God's message, to establish an affiliation, connection and purpose with God. But, we see Daniel agree to all these changes because he knew names and literature do not "defile" him or cause him to "sin against God."

But Daniel draws a line in the sand that he won't cross when it comes to what he eats. Why would he do that? Because the food from the king's table would have been offered to pagan idols before it was eaten. To eat this food would be to participate in idol worship—something a faithful follower of God would not do. You could change Daniel's name, you could take away his language and make him read your books, but he would not participate in the worship of anyone but the one true God. He would not defile himself before God. His relationship with God was preeminent above all else. Amazing!

So, what did Daniel do? Did he spit out the wine in the king's face and call him an idolater? No. Tactfully, he asked for permission to not eat this food. He literally said, "Please." He was building relationships; thinking long term; behaving in a way that would help him win favor with the people for whom and with whom he worked. Then he makes a proposition or compromise. "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 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." Here, Daniel is making a pledge. He is saying in effect, "If you will allow us to obey God, we won't let you down. (God won't let us down.) We will be the best servants in the palace."

At the conclusion of the ten-day trial, the verdict came in: "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food." But not only were they better in health and appearance, they were better in wisdom and understanding—ten times better than anyone else. For three years they devoted themselves to learning a new language, studying new literature, and absorbing a new culture, and they became the best workers in the palace. Do you see what they were doing? They were building a platform for ministry to the ungodly Babylonians!

Notice that there was technically no real *ministry* taking place—not yet anyway. No real *impact* Daniel was having on the people

around him. Daniel was laying a foundation for a lifetime of ministry and God was definitely working behind the scenes. God was the one that delivered and ordained for the Jewish people to be overtaken by an ungodly king and nation. This God-ordained discipline is hard to understand but is further proof of God's love for his people, like fatherly love. And God is continuing to work behind the scenes for His glory. God is the one who caused the Babylonian official to show favor and compassion to Daniel. God is the one who provided the physical nourishment Daniel needed during his test. God is the one who provided understanding for them about all kinds of earthly literature. And God will be the one who gives Daniel supernatural understanding of visions and dreams.

Jesus in Daniel 1

We know now, from the New Testament, that Jesus is the source of all knowledge and understanding. Daniel and his friends received knowledge and understanding of all kinds from God, but we now receive it all fully from Christ. "My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3). Want to know more about God? —seek Christ. Want to know more about being disciplined in your studies? —seek Christ. Want to know wisdom for your future? —seek Christ.

The way Daniel and his friends lived in chapter one, and the chapters to follow, was a clear example of what Jesus prayed for his followers in John 17:15-18. Jesus prayed that his followers would be holy and protected from the evil one. And he prayed that they would be sent into the world as messengers of God, like Christ was sent into the world. Daniel did all of these things. He chose not to defile himself; he lives in their world, learns their language and teachings, yet he represents godliness to the ungodly officials."

Jesus wants the same for you. He wants you to walk with God because He is worthy of our lives. He wants you to live a life of holiness, because you have been set apart by God to walk in a manner that is worthy of Him. He wants you to pursue self-sacrificing loving friendships with non-Christians because all people bear His image. And He wants you to represent Him to the people around you, because everyone deserves to hear about the great and loving message of salvation from God in Christ. The focus of Daniel's ministry is to see the praises of God declared throughout the earth. As we will see, through patient incremental steps, this is achieved at a level Daniel couldn't have dreamed or imagined. The same goal ought to be in our hearts, for we are "a chosen people...God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).