

The Book of Daniel

Chapter One



The first chapter of Daniel provides not only an introduction to the book, but also a glimpse into the character of Daniel and our first example of God's faithfulness to him.

1:1-2 – An invasion of Judah

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god."

Jehoiakim – King of Judah. His real name is Eliakim. He reigned 11 years and was a son of Josiah. His father was murdered by Pharaoh Neco and his brother, Jehoahaz, reigned for three months before being taken prisoner by Pharaoh Neco. Pharaoh Neco then set Eliakim (Jehoiakim) up as king.

- Eliakim – whom God will raise up
- Jehoiakim – he whom Jehovah has set up

Nebuchadnezzar – A King of Babylon, son of Nabopolassar. He had a reign that spanned around 43 years. During his reign, Babylon was at its peak of power and dominance. He rebuilt almost every city and province within his dominion and later beautified Babylon by building the hanging gardens.

- Nebuchadnezzar – Nebo, protect the crown!
- Nebo – A god whom the Babylonians worshipped

The timing of this event was approximately 605 B.C. Read also 2 Kings 23:31-24:4 and 2 Chronicles 36:1-8 for another perspective. In the account from 2 Kings, we read that God allowed this to befall Judah because of the "sins of Manassah" and the shedding of innocent blood. We also read here in Daniel that the "Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand..." Who was Manassah and what did he do? (See 2 Kings 21:1-18)

Manassah was a wicked king that brought Judah into more abomination than any other king before him. Because of this prolonged period of rebellion, God promised to deliver Judah into the hands of their enemies. It was only the righteous reign of Josiah (31 years) that prolonged the judgment for 37 years after the reign of Manassah (642 – 605).

Kings of Judah	Good or Bad	Reign (B.C.)
Hezekiah	Good	715 – 686
Manassah	Bad	686 – 642
Amon	Bad	642 – 640
Josiah	Good	640 – 609
Jehoahaz	Bad	3 months
Jehoiakim	Bad	609 – 597
Zedekiah	Bad	597 – 586

Why would Nebuchadnezzar take some of the vessels of the temple to the house of his god?

Doing this would be seen as a display of the power and dominance of the Babylonian gods over the God of Israel. It was likely a common occurrence for a conquering nation. It would break the collective spirit and hope of the conquered nation by demonstrating that their god was helpless to assist them.

Where have we seen Babylon before in the Bible? (See Genesis 11:1-9)

This Babylon was a long descendant of the city built by the descendants of Noah before they were dispersed by God with the judgment of languages. The name Babel means, "confusion" in the Hebrew. Those who settled in that area eventually became a great nation that spread throughout the eastern world.

Shinar – Another name for the land of Babylon

1:3-7 – The abduction of Daniel, Hanaiah, Mishael, and Azariah

"And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring [certain] of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom [was] no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as [had] ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing

The Book of Daniel: Chapter One

them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel [the name] of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego."

Ashpenaz – The **chief** of Nebuchadnezzar's court. He is called a eunuch in this passage, but the word eunuch also means "chief of court". Whether they really were eunuchs is debatable.

Daniel – a young Jewish man from the royal family or nobility of Judah

- Daniel – **God is my judge**
- Belteshazzar – **may Bel protect his life (Bel / Baal was the national god of the Babylon)**

Hananiah – a young Jewish man from the royal family or nobility of Judah

- Hananiah – **grace, mercy, a gift of the Lord**
- Shadrach – **command of Aku (the moon god)**

Mishael – a young Jewish man from the royal family or nobility of Judah

- Mishael – **who is He that is God?**
- Meshach – **who is what Aku (the moon god)**

Azariah – a young Jewish man from the royal family or nobility of Judah

- Azariah – **Jehovah has helped**
- Abed-nego – **servant of Nebo**

Why would Nebuchadnezzar seek youths from the royal family and nobility of Judah to serve him?

This would help to secure Judah's allegiance to Babylon as the children of their prominent leaders were now serving in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar.

What was the purpose of their education?

They were to be "Babylonionized" by learning the language spoken there and the literature, which shaped the thoughts and ideas of that people. They would also be given a very lavish lifestyle that would further endear them to the Babylonians. The end result was to make them good advisors and a solidifying force in an empire made up of conquered nations.

Why were they renamed?

Changing someone's name is a sign of authority and the beginning of a new direction in their life. The Babylonians changed the Hebrew boys names so they knew they were clearly subject to their authority and to immerse them in their new Babylonian lives. This is similar to Nebuchadnezzar taking of the temple's implements and putting them in the house of their gods. Each boy had a name that clearly exalted the Lord God. They were given names that exalted the Babylonian gods.

1:8-17 – Their first test

"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. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why

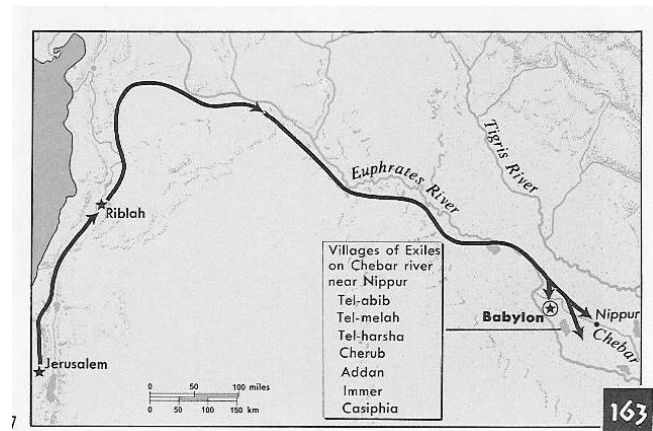


Figure 1: Exile of Judeans to Babylonia

The Book of Daniel: Chapter One

should he see your faces worse liking than the children which [are] of your sort? then shall ye make [me] endanger my head to the king. Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams."

In this passage, we see the intertwining of man's responsibility toward obedience and God's sovereign intervention to accomplish His will and bless those who love Him.

The Principle of Purpose

The first part of this passage mentions that Daniel "purposed in his heart" to be obedient to God. There is a significant principle here that we see throughout Scriptures. Look at the following examples:

- Joshua 24:15 – **Joshua determined that he and his household would follow God**
- Ezra 7:10 – **Ezra prepared his heart to learn, do and teach the law of God**
- Ruth 1:17-18 – **Ruth determined to stay with Naomi, no matter what**
- 1 Kings 5:5 – **Solomon purposed to build the temple for God**
- Acts 11:23 – **Barnabas taught the Church at Antioch to purpose in their heart to follow God**

Did God bless each of these individuals for their determined attitude?

Yes, they accomplished the purpose that they set and the Lord blessed them for their obedience. Joshua saw the Promised Land, God revived Israel through Ezra, Ruth found her kinsman redeemer, Solomon built a sanctuary for God and the Church at Antioch became a powerful missionary church from which Paul, Barnabas, and many others likely went forth.

Purposing something in your heart is more than an act of stubbornness. It is born out of a conviction that your purpose is aligned with God's will and therefore has His blessing. Let's look at Daniel's conviction.

The King's Meat and Wine

There is a two-fold reason that Daniel and his friends did not partake of the king's meat and wine. First, it is likely that many of the meats eaten by the Babylonians violated the Jewish dietary laws. These laws prohibited them from eating "unclean" animals (see Leviticus 11:45-47). They were counted as unclean by either their identity (cloven foot, fowls of the air, ...) or by their method of death (strangled, natural death, torn to pieces, ...).

However, not all of the meat consumed at the king's table would be unclean. Couldn't they have just asked for beef, chicken, or some other kosher food? Also, the Jews commonly drank wine, so it is not likely that Daniel and his friend would have refused the wine because it contained alcohol. The reason for their refusal to eat was the Babylonian custom of offering the first part of their libations (alcoholic beverages) and their meat to their idol gods. To eat meat and drink wine with the Babylonians was to take part in an idolatrous act. Read Deuteronomy 32:36-38 for an example of God's disapproval of those who took part in such acts.

Drawing the Line in the Sand

How did Daniel pursue his conviction? Is there something we can learn from this?

Rather than making a scene or causing a showdown, Daniel sought to work within the existing system to follow his convictions. There is a time for the fiery furnace and lion's den, but it isn't something we should choose. It must be a last resort. Our point is not to draw attention to ourselves, but to glorify God.

The Book of Daniel: Chapter One

What was the prince of the eunuch's concern with allowing Daniel and friends to eat pulse?

He had to answer to the king. If some of the young men he was training didn't even look healthy, then he would be responsible because he allowed them to do this.

How did God intervene to make this test possible?

God gave Daniel favor with the chief eunuch. This may have been the result of Daniel's godly living and character combined with God's softening of the chief eunuch's heart.

Explain the wisdom of Daniel's proposed solution in light of 1 Peter 2:17 and Romans 12:18.

It allowed the eunuch to avoid any trouble by establishing a short duration for the test compared to the three years that they would be under his care. It also allowed them to be faithful to God during that time and seek His intervention to allow them to continue. This was a win-win situation. They feared God and sought to keep His commandment. Yet, they tried to respect the king and his appointed leaders. They sought to maintain peace with all men.

What is pulse?

The word pulse means, "something sown". In this context it is any food derived from plants. This would include breads, fruits, vegetables, nuts, etc....

How did God bless Daniel and his friends? How was Daniel distinguished from them?

He gave them knowledge in their fields of study. These included literature and philosophy from that culture. It is important to note that they did learn the religion of that people, but their knowledge gave them discernment rather than integrating them with the culture. Daniel was distinguished by a God-given ability to interpret dreams. This is consistent with his role as a Biblical prophet.

1:18-21 – The result of faithfulness

"Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus"

Is it fair to say that faithfulness to God always results in material blessing?

No. There are many examples of God's people possessing nothing, yet being tremendously blessed by God.

Is it fair to say that faithfulness to God always results in some type of blessing?

Yes. In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul commented that our light affliction cannot be compared to the eternal weight of glory that we will receive if we are faithful to Him.

God could have blessed Daniel and his friends in many ways. Knowing what you know about what lies ahead in Daniel and the rest of Scripture, why did the Lord choose this path of blessing?

It positioned Daniel for God's purpose in his life. Through his faithfulness, he was able to witness to kings and record prophecy that would guide and comfort God's people through the coming centuries.

Items for Discussion:

What have you learned from Chapter One that impacts your daily life?