

Series: The Book of Daniel
"Facing Changes with Courage"
Daniel Chapter One

Introduction

Daniel writes the Book of Daniel to demonstrate God's sovereignty over history. Chapter One introduces God as the One who controls everything that happens. He is the possessor of sovereign will and power. He is Almighty God. And just as God saved Daniel and his friends from their enemies, He desires to save Israel from oppression if the people will return to Him. Because of Israel's rebellion, God delivers Israel and Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. This same God sends Daniel and his friends into Babylonian exile, yet gives them grace and mercy and provides them with a representative of exceptional knowledge and skill.

We learn this in the first Chapter of Daniel, which begins, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his God; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his God." ([Daniel 1:1-2 NKJV](#))

Daniel and his friends are part of the first deportation of those taken from Judah to Babylon. In the first year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar came against Egypt at Carchemish on the Euphrates River and defeated her.

The Battle of Carchemish is one of the great battles of history. It occurred in 605 B.C. between the armies of Egypt, allied with the remnants of the Assyrian army, against the armies of Babylonia, allied with the Medes, Persians, and Scythians. The Egyptian army of Pharaoh Necho II was delayed at Megiddo by the forces of King Josiah of Judah. Josiah was killed, and his army was defeated, but it delayed Egypt getting to the battle at Carchemish, which probably significantly impacted the outcome. Nebuchadnezzar then made Judah, Syria, and other neighboring countries subject to Babylon. It was also the beginning of Judah's seventy years of captivity to Babylon, prophesied by Jeremiah in Jeremiah Chapter 25:1-11.

The destruction of Judah took place in three stages:

1. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar subjugated Jehoiakim. (Daniel and his friends, Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego, were taken to Babylon at this time.)
2. In 597 B.C., due to the rebellious acts of Jehoiakim and then Jehoichin, the Babylonians attacked Judah again and took 10,000 people captive to Babylon. (Among them was Jehoiachin and the young prophet Ezekiel. At this time, Zedekiah was made king.)
3. In 586 B.C., after a long siege due to Zedekiah's rebellion, almost all Jews were taken captive to Babylon, and the nation was destroyed.

The name Jehoiakim means "The Lord will establish." But Jehoiakim was a wicked and sinful king and turned away from the Lord. The name Nebuchadnezzar means: "Nebo protects." Marduk, or Bel as he came to be called, was the chief God of Babylon. Bel (Baal) was the same deity as the Roman god Jupiter. The Greek god Zeus was also the same deity as Bel.

The Baal-bull deity was one of the most infamous gods mentioned in the Bible.

Some say the recent Commonwealth Games in the U.K. bring back glimpses of the ancient worship of Baal. A giant, armored Bull was a central part of the Opening Ceremony. The Bull was pulled on stage by 50 women representing the female chain-makers of the Industrial Revolution who made chains used in the slave trade. The segment featured the women breaking free from their chains to symbolize their release from oppression and a new freedom to worship the bull without being forced. So, it seems like Bel is alive and well in the 21st century.

Another significant god was "Nebo," the God of learning and letters. Nebo was a Chaldaean god embodied in the planet Mercury.

Nebuchadnezzar was named after this god. Nebo was a prince of gods and the God of fire. In verse 3, we read, "Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah." ([Daniel 1:3-6 NKJV](#))

Daniel, who was once a member of the royal family, is now a slave in Babylon. The king tells Ashpenaz, master of the eunuchs, to train Daniel and his companions for service in the royal court.

The qualifications for court services:

1. They must be princes
2. They must be young and without blemish physically
3. handsome in appearance
4. well educated
5. skillful in wisdom and knowledge
6. proficient in the sciences
7. refined and taught how to stand before kings
8. taught the writing and language of the Chaldeans (Ancient Babylonian cuneiform writing.)

Daniel's enslavement was not the result of his own sin but because of the sin of the nation. The whole nation of Judah had failed God and sinned. Daniel was simply a part of the nation. However, even though God judged the nation, He would undertake for the righteous. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were to receive a daily provision of the king's meat and wine. They would be groomed and taught for three years so that they might stand before the king and serve in the court.

The prince of the eunuchs changed the names of the foreigners chosen to serve in the court. Verse 7 says, "To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego." ([Daniel 1:7 NKJV](#))

Following the custom of subjugating foreign nations, those chosen to serve were given new names. Daniel means, "God is the judge." But his new name Belteshazzar meant "Prince of Bel." The changing of Daniel's name is mentioned five times in twelve chapters. Obviously, Daniel didn't like his new name. He uses his Jewish name 75 times in the book of Daniel. Daniel's purpose of heart and commitment were firm. He was determined not to turn away from God.

Hananiah means "Gift of the Lord" or "Beloved of Jehovah." He was renamed Shadrach, meaning "command of Aku," the moon god. Mishael means "who is like God." He was renamed Meshach, which meant "who is as Aku." Azariah means "whom Jehovah helps" or "Jehovah is my God." He was renamed Abednego, meaning "servant of Nebo." The meaning of words and names was of great importance to the Hebrews.

Immediately, Daniel and his friends face a challenge. They are given a fantastic meal from the king's table. Verse 8 says, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who *are* your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king." So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, *so* deal with your servants." So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. And at the end of ten days, their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables." ([Daniel 1:8-16 NKJV](#))

Daniel is the spokesman for the group. He outlines their purpose. They would not eat certain things from the king's table which might not have been appropriately butchered, forbidden by the law of Moses, or any meat offered to idols. They took a

firm stand regardless of the consequences and stood by their convictions. But they were creative and offered an alternative.

God gave Daniel favor with the prince of the eunuchs. However, their favoritism sparked jealousy and envy in others who oppressed them. Satan will always test, in many different ways, those who are committed to the Lord. But a faithful servant can be trusted by God.

Daniel convinces Melzar, the eunuch in charge, to allow them to eat only the things they request for ten days. The test was a real challenge of faith. It didn't allow much time to see a significant physical difference between their eating habits. Daniel requested to eat "pulse" and drink water. In Hebrew, Pulse is zeroim, meaning "seed that is sown." It would consist of vegetables and grains such as wheat, barley, rye, peas, beans, and lentils. The Jews weren't vegetarians, but being a vegetarian was a good way not to violate the Law of Moses. At the end of ten days, their condition was so good that Melzar took away the meat and drink and allowed them all the "pulse" they wanted.

Their diet favored their convictions, and they were fit vessels for God's use. Verse 17 says, "As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who *were* in all his realm. Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus."

(Daniel 1:17-21 NKJK)

These four young men undoubtedly had the supernatural touch of God upon their lives. God physically blessed them as they took a stand regarding diet. And in turn, God blessed them with unique mental and spiritual understanding, especially regarding God's law. Daniel also had a special gift for understanding and interpreting visions and dreams.

The king decreed that these four young Hebrew men were to be groomed and prepared for three years. At the end of their training period, they were brought in to be questioned by the king. It was apparent to him that there were none of the others like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Their wisdom was ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in his realm.

Daniel was appointed as the chief advisor to the king. Daniel held this position for the entire 70 years of captivity, proving God provides for His people even in times of judgment and difficulty. Daniel had a long, successful, and influential career even though he was in captivity. He purposed in his heart that he would live for God regardless of the circumstances or consequences. His deep convictions gained him the highest respect in Babylon.

I. Look to God for Help During Suffering

A basic tenant of your faith must be a belief that God is sovereign over all things in every situation. Even during times of suffering, God works to bring us to a place where we can experience His goodness. Verse 2 tells us that God delivered them into the hand of their enemy. Why? The primary cause of Israel's exile was they no longer loved the Lord their God with all their heart. They were no longer worshipping and honoring God. They were utterly immersed in worshipping the gods of the unbelievers. Yahweh was now just one of the many gods they served.

God could not overlook Judah's sinfulness, just as God will not overlook America's sinfulness. All of us have in some way been touched by this sinfulness and brought the gods of this world into our lives. God is not uninvolved or passive about your sinfulness.

God is the one who sent Israel into exile. (Ezekiel 39:28) He is the one who rules the kingdoms of men. (Daniel 4:17) But God did not exile Israel to destroy her. Through Daniel and his companions, we see a glorious picture of God's help during the suffering. God's purpose in allowing our suffering is to bring us back to faith and confidence in His sovereign rule and Divine love.

God wants to bring you to the place that Joseph came to when he told his brothers, "You planned evil against me, but God planned it for good." (Genesis 50:20) That is how we must understand our suffering.

Although our sinful ways may have led us into a difficult situation, we can look to God for His good and sovereign healing and deliverance. We can know and trust that God has not utterly abandoned us. We can examine our own hearts, repent of our sins, and resolve to obey His commands.

The temptation to forsake God is strong when we suffer. But when we determine to hold fast to Him, He will work in all things for good (Rom. 8:28).

II. Help Those Around You See God

It took three years for Daniel and his friends to be trained in the way of Babylon. It's important to realize that they did not resist this plan. Even when their names were changed, they didn't oppose it. They only opposed those things that directly opposed God. In everything else, they submitted to the authority and rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, one of the most wicked and idolatrous rulers of his day. It's consistent with Jeremiah 29, where God tells those in exile to seek the welfare and good of the city.

Some Christians have much to learn from this. Being holy during suffering and pain often means being an example and seeking the good of others. It's so easy when you're suffering to block out everything around you to turn inward, focusing primarily on your own pain and suffering. We can forget the needs of those around us, even when they are greater than our own.

When we get right with God, He empowers us for His glory and helps us seek the good of those around us, even in our suffering. God's love and grace give us confidence during our suffering that can be attractive to unbelievers. Are your times of suffering self-serving, or are you an example to others of faith and confidence in God?

III. Always Remain faithful to God

Some writers say Daniel refrained from the king's food to demonstrate the true source of his strength. If Daniel and his friends ate the king's food, those around them would mistake Babylon as the source of their strength and resilience. It became evident to their superiors that their healthy appearance, usually attained by the meats and wine from the king's table, was miraculously achieved through a diet of vegetables.

Daniel gave the credit to God. Daniel never lost sight of the one true God, even in a foreign land. He was committed to trusting God faithfully. Daniel understood that material possessions could never replace the blessing of God. Even the king's delicacies could not sustain and secure him.

Suffering reveals the depth of our hope and trust in God. How often do we run to the wrong things for security, refuge, and comfort? What do you rely upon as your hope? Do you bow down before the gods of this age or to the ageless God who created us? Do you have the resolve to remain holy to God in all things?

Conclusion

Who do you run to when judgment and suffering come? What table do you feast at – the table of earthly kings? Or the table of the King of Kings? Many believers are teaching those around them to break the commandments of God by the way they live their lives. It is of little wonder so many young people today have no moral compass to guide their lives. What does God need to do to bring us back to a place of dedication and devotion to Him?

David wasn't perfect, but he was devoted to God. Moses did it. Elijah did it. Jesus did it! Hebrews 12:1 says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." ([Hebrews 12:1-2 NKJV](#))

Fix your eyes upon Jesus. Though He was holy and righteous, he experienced the ultimate exile on the cross. He was despised and forsaken to bring us to repentance and faith. He was rejected and abandoned so that God might welcome us. Only by trusting and treasuring him can we be holy in our times of suffering and exile. Don't look at the circumstances; look to God.