

Daniel 1 • The first deportation to Babylon

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I'd like you to open your Bibles please to Daniel chapter 1. Daniel is such a, such an incredible book, very interesting, very insightful book written by a young man. Well, I don't know how young he was when he wrote it. He was at least a young man when he was taken deported by the Babylonians to their kingdom from his own world in the north or the southern kingdom of Judah.

You'll remember that Daniel lived at a time in Judah's history. Remember, the northern kingdom of Israel had long since been dispersed by the Assyrian army. Since that time, the Babylonians came into power and so the southern kingdom of Judah is the only one that exists at this point and they too had fallen into great idolatry and paganism.

And so God finally judged them in a disciplinary manner by allowing the Babylonian military to kind of come and basically conquer them. And this is what we're going to start reading about here in Daniel chapter 1. You'll notice actually that Daniel begins this letter or this book rather, with a timestamp, and we always appreciate when the biblical writers do that.

Notice in verse 1, Daniel writes, *"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah,..."*. Now let me tell you what's going on and because this is an important time stamp because he's telling you about the period of time when the Babylonians came for the very first time and invaded the land and essentially conquered the southern kingdom of Judah without destroying it.

But Daniel tells us in the latter half of verse 1 that, *"... Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it."* And so here you have the Babylonian army besieging the city of Jerusalem. They eventually give in, the Babylonians come into the city without destroying it though at this point and they begin to take some people back to Babylon.

Now, this has been a rough several years for the southern kingdom of Judah. They, Josiah, you remember king Josiah? He was the last good king in the southern kingdom of Judah. But you'll remember the king Josiah died what I consider to be a very untimely death.

He went up against Pharaoh's army of Egypt and he, the Lord didn't tell him to. And he did it anyway, kind of did it in the own, his own pride and stubbornness and he was killed in battle. And so, when Josiah was killed, the people of Judah put one of his sons on the throne in his place. And it was, interestingly enough, one of Josiah's younger sons, a man by the name of Jehoahaz, and so they put him, the people put Jehoahaz on the throne.

And then Pharaoh, who had killed Josiah decided he wanted to flex his muscle. So he came into Judah and he dethroned Jehoahaz, took him to Egypt and put his older brother Jehoiakim on the throne as a puppet king. Well, in the meantime, Babylon takes a more prominent place on the stage of military prowess and they come against Judah during the time of Jehoiakim.

Notice Daniel says, it's in the 3rd year of Jehoiakim's reign, and they flex their muscle and essentially take the city. So, Daniel goes on to write in verse 2, *"And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, (meaning the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon) with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them (meaning the vessels) to the land of Shinar,..."* Which is an ancient name or an ancient term for Babylon. When you see that name "Shinar" you're just, you're hearing Babylon. And it says he took those vessels ⁴² *...to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god."*

Do you remember this was a fairly common thing to do. When a conquering king, who was of course a pagan, came and conquered another king who was a pagan usually, he would take whatever was valuable and he would take those things into the temple of his god in a way of kind of showing that his god was superior to the god that he had just conquered. Because they believed that it wasn't just armies that were at war, they believed the gods were at war with one another.

And so, if my army conquered your army, that means my god is tougher than your god, you see? So he would take, whoever the conquering army was, would take those things and put them in the temple of their god. Do you remember the Philistines did this during the time of Eli the high priest, the nation of Israel fell to the Philistines and they actually captured the Arc of the Covenant you'll remember, and they took the Arc of the Covenant and they put it in the temple of their god Dagon.

And again, it was a clear demonstration of what they believed to be the superiority of one god over another. And that's one of the things that happens here.

But the next thing Daniel writes in verse 3 is very interesting because he says, *“ Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family (and again, that means of the Davidic line, okay) and of the nobility, (so their larger family) ⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”*

Okay, once again, this was fairly common when a conquering king would come in and take a city, he wanted to benefit from the conquering of that city, and so he would take the best of what that nation had to offer, including the best and the brightest of their people. Particularly the youth, people that he could, he could speak into and he could educate and he could bring into conformity with his way of kind of thinking.

And so he brought some of these individuals and Daniel is going to go in this very first deportation. And by the way, Daniel is one of those people that talks about here, who was of the royal family. Daniel was actually of the, in the lineage of David. So, and oh, by the way, this is the time when Ezekiel was also taken captive in the first deportation.

And these men were probably quite young. In fact, it talks here about the fact that they were young could have been in their late teens, early twenties, more likely. So, and, oh and king Jehoiakim, who was on the throne at the time, was also deported along with those people to Babylon. I don't know if you remember way back in our study of Isaiah, but God told the people of the land through Isaiah that this would happen, He foretold it. Let me show you this on the screen from Isaiah chapter 39, it says,

Isaiah 39:7 (ESV)

“And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

So the Lord had told them beforehand that these sorts of things would take place and now, here in the time of Daniel, they are in fact. So, next we're going to see how the king prepared these men for service.

Look at verse 5 with me, and this is an interesting verse too. It says, *“ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.”*

So not only would the king feed them and take care of them and so this was they were going to be well taken care of. I mean, they, when the Bible talks about how he ate at the king's table, you'll hear that reference sometimes about, sometimes it'll be a conquered king who will come to the nation of the conqueror and it says he ate at his table for the rest of his life.

That doesn't mean he sat at his table and they looked at each other across the table. It means he ate the king's food, he was given a portion from the king. And that's what's going on here, these men were given the king's portion, and so it was, this was the best food of the land. I mean, this was the cream of the crop, the prime cut choice cuts of meat, best things that you could..., pie, the wine that was aged and wonderful and on and on and on. So these men were to be taken care of, they were also to be educated as we see here for 3 years. They're to learn the culture, the literature, the art and all, and the religion of the people of Babylon.

Now I want to stop you, I guess right there for just a moment if I could. I want you to think about what it would be like, if you living here in the United States of America. Well, if we as a country were conquered by some foreign nation and they decided to take some of our youth late senior high to early college age type youth and card them off to their country to learn their culture, their language, their religion, and everything about them that would educate them in the ways of that foreign land.

First of all, how would you feel as a parent? I can about imagine. How would you feel as a youth being taken away from your family? Having to take up residents in a completely foreign country, learning a completely different language, learning new ways.

Now, put yourself in that position, as a believer in God. Here you are worshiping the one true God, and you're being taken to a nation where they worship many gods. They've got gods for every day of the week. They've got gods that control the sun, the moon, the stars, the crops, the fertility of human beings, they've got a god for everything.

And you're to learn it and you're to be educated in those ways. Compelled, doesn't matter whether you want to learn it or not, you're going to learn it. You can imagine what that was like for Daniel and these other young individuals who were taken away from the culture that they loved and seemingly away from the worship of the God that they loved.

Well, verse 6 begins to get a little more personal with us by giving the names of these men. It says, "*Among these were* (and so there were many, but were only highlighting the fact that among these they were:) *Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.*" (And that would probably mean that they were of nobility, if not, as I said before, of the lineage of David.) "⁷ *And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: (and these are Babylonian names) Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.*"

So here it's, again, you're taken off into a foreign land, you're compelled to learn all of this information from this foreign country and kind of as almost a final show of control, to you. To communicate to you in no uncertain terms that your past life is over, we're going to give you a new name.

And this is particularly grievous to a young Jewish individual because as names meant a lot to the Jews. They would often name their kids based on circumstances or characteristics of the child or something like that. In fact, Daniel's name means "God is my judge," but he was given a new name and that new name was "Belteshazzar" which had some kind of a meaning related to the pagan deity of Bel, one of the, one of their many deities. Something about protecting Bel.

There's a little confusion as to exactly what that name means, but I'm sure Daniel knew and understood that his God-given name that meant a lot to him, was taken away and replaced with a pagan name, pointing to a pagan deity. Whatever it meant, it was a daily reminder to these young men that the pagan influence of their new home was to be the norm.

Now, as we come to verse 8, we're actually told a lot about the character of the man, Daniel. Look what it says here in verse 8, it says, "*But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. ...*". Now I need to tell you after looking at this one verse, that there's a strong word in this verse, and that's the word "defile". It's used many times throughout the Old Testament particularly when God puts up prohibitions telling his people not to defile themselves, but it means to be polluted by something, okay.

So, Daniel is determining, he's resolving within himself that he's not going to pollute himself with the king's food or with the wine that was given to him to eat. So now what we need to do is we need to talk a little bit about exactly what Daniel is objecting to in this situation. Because you have to understand that for Daniel to eat the king's food it would essentially cause him and his fellow Jews

to violate certain prohibitions that had been put into the law, into the Mosaic law for all Jews about foods that they were not to eat. Now, in addition to that, there's a pretty good bet that all of the King's food, before it got to his table would've been sacrificed to a pagan deity and that too was considered to be a very grievous thing for a Jew to eat such food. And, in fact, to partake of it, would be a violation of what they knew God had revealed in his word. Let me show you one such reference on the screen from Exodus chapter 34, it says,

Exodus 34:15 (ESV)

...lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice,

And when on to talk about how bad of a thing that would actually be. So this is something that all the Jews were well aware of, and Daniel knew and understood that this food before it came to the king's table would've been sacrificed to various pagan idols.

So in the middle of verse 8, if you look with me here, it says, “ ... *Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.*” Now that's interesting language. He didn't, it doesn't just say here, so Daniel went to the chief of the eunuchs and said, can I please not eat that food? He didn't.

He actually said, I don't want to defile myself and what that tells us in this verse is that David, or excuse me, Daniel explained the significance of that food. In other words, he wanted a religious exemption from eating the king's food, all right. But he explained that it was on religious grounds, it was on the grounds of his own personal devotion to Yahweh that he did not want to eat this food.

Now we're told in verse 9 that, “*And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king.”*”

You see what he's telling Daniel? He's saying, listen, dude, if I withhold that food and you don't eat it, and you end up looking all gaunt and unhealthy in front of the king, he's going to come to me because I was given the job of taking care of you. And if you're not looking right, he's going to say, you didn't do your job, off with your head.

And so he's telling Daniel, you're putting me in a kind of a dangerous situation here, but it goes on to say in verse 11, and apparently there's some time between the end of verse 10 and the beginning of verse 11, because in verse 9 and 10, Daniel is having a conversation with the chief eunuch, but you'll notice in verse 11 now he's speaking to the steward of the chief of the eunuch.

So there's been some time passing here, and apparently Daniel, I'm assuming he's had time to pray about it, and perhaps the Lord has even given him a word, perhaps even a promise. It says, ¹¹ *Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,* ¹² *“Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.”* ¹³ *Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see.”*

This is really very brilliant when you think about it, because Daniel is proposing a test related to this whole food thing. And he says, listen, if you're worried about this, then let's just do a test for 10 days. He's going to be there for 3 years before he gets in to see the king. There's a long period of time of education and training and so forth, so there's 10 days is nothing. So he says, listen, you give me some different food for 10 days and then you test and compare how we look compared to the other young people who are here.

Now, remember, the Babylonians by this time had conquered many nations, so there's young people of some nobility and so forth that are all there from other nations being trained and schooled and educated and so forth. So, it goes on to say in verse 14, *“So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days.”* ¹⁵ *At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance (and I think this is interesting) and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.”* ¹⁶ *So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.”*

Okay, we need to talk about this. Because you see, when Daniel proposed a test to see how they looked after 10 days of consuming only vegetables and water, you know that he was expecting a miracle to take place.

Because, and apparently it did too because we're told again in verse 15 that Daniel and his friends were quote, *“fatter in flesh.”* It's not a terribly nice thing to say about someone, but you know what it means? It means they looked healthy and well fed, but fatter in flesh versus those who ate all of that calorie ridden, fattening food that showed up on the king's table. That's a miracle, right?

That is a miracle, because you I got news for you, you don't get fatter eating vegetables and water. I don't know if you've ever gone on a diet of vegetables and water, but that's not the way you get, I mean, when's the last time you saw a fat vegan? It's just ,they're not around, they're just, they're all skinny..., or they turn sideways and they disappear, right, we all know that.

So here you go, this is a bonafide miracle. So what we have going on, the Lord met Daniel here and these 3 other men at the point of their determination to be devoted to the Lord related to these dietary restrictions that were in the Mosaic covenant. And you have to believe when you read this story, that this was kind of the Lord's way of preparing these 4 young men.

This is a fairly small deal. I mean, they get this food and they see this food coming from the king's table and they're like, oh, good grief, we're not going to eat that. That, we'd violate, every, prohibition that God's given us related to food and drink, we can't do this. Well guys, this is nothing compared to what's coming down the pike.

The temptations, the testings, the challenges that these men are going to face in the coming months, years, this is a walk in the park. But, don't you know that God allows us to go through situations, that present us with opportunities to compromise our faith, that might be in smaller doses so that we might be prepared later on for dealing with the big challenges to our faith. Because the opportunity to compromise is going to become far more dangerous in the coming years.

And you have to ask the question, what are they going to do? What are you going to do when you're living in a foreign country where if you don't comply, they'll kill you? They'll just flat out kill you and they won't think twice about it, there's no remorse, we're not backing down. You do what the king says are we kill you, it's as simple as that. That whole idea of compromising or not compromising takes on a whole new definition when you're in that sort of a situation.

And like Daniel and his friends, we face situations too, don't we? In our lives where we are tempted to compromise what we know to be true, or our faith in God, our trust in the Lord, God's Word tells us to trust in the Lord with all of our hearts. (Proverbs 3:5) That's a fairly all-inclusive phrase, "all of our hearts," not just some. And I don't know about you, but I get tempted all the time to back away from the strength of that command to trust him with all of my heart.

And we're tempted to compromise. And we too, like Daniel, we need to come to a place, like I said, I think that there was a period of prayer in here between when Daniel was speaking to the chief eunuch and then to the steward where he went to the Lord and sought the face of God, what are we going to do? What are we going to do here?

And we have to learn how to solve those kinds of problems by going to the Lord, seeking God's face, asking for boldness and courage in the face of a potential compromising situation, so that we might face that thing in both humility and wisdom. Not to purposely upset people, but to be diplomatic and kind.

And you'll notice how Daniel handles this thing. He's not a jerk about it, I'm not going to eat that slop. He doesn't say anything like that. He's respectful and he honors the order of authority that he's been given of those who are over him and so forth. Those things aren't easy to do, but it, another thing that's important to note about this particular story thus far is what is the motive of Daniel's appeal to the steward and thus to of course, the chief eunuch, what is his motive here?

Is it simply to get out of a difficult situation? I don't want to eat that food, yuck. No, that's not it, he's not trying to just escape an uncomfortable or inconvenient circumstance. David, or excuse me, Daniel has a motive of obedience to God. Daniel wants to obey the Lord, he wants to honor God's Word, that's key.

When you object, when you are going against some potentially compromising situation, your goal, your motive should be, I want to honor the Lord with my life, I want to honor him with my faith. And that's what we see Daniel doing here.

And one other final thing that I want you to notice about this. Did you notice that he didn't object to everything? Did you notice Daniel didn't object to ...? He, yes, he objected to the food, there was a specific thing there where it violated the food laws that had been handed down through the Mosaic law. But you noticed he didn't object to the education, he didn't object to learning their language, he didn't object to learning their culture.

He didn't even object to having his name changed, even though I'm sure that was a fairly painful sort of a situation. What I'm getting at is, Daniel picked his battles, and that's important because there are places you can compromise without compromising your faith. There are places you cannot compromise without compromising your faith. And you need to walk in the kind of discernment from the Lord to know which is which. If you're going to object to

everything that's in front of you, even if it's really not a compromising thing for the Lord, you're going to end up just making enemies.

Daniel wisely picked his battles as to what he was going to say, I can't do that. That's an important thing to remember. And as exciting as it must have been for Daniel to actually see the Lord respond after that 10 days, to see him to and his friends go before the chief guy and he goes, yeah, you guys look great vegetables and water, wow, who would've thought?

I mean, that would've been cool, to see that the Lord answered this, the Lord responded. But more important to that, this is one of those sorts of things that causes your faith to grow. I mean, it's exciting to see God work, but ultimately you want to see your faith growing because there's, like I said before, there's going to be much more life threatening tests coming down the pike.

And so this is, God has him kind of in school to build his faith up so that it's going to be prepared for dealing with those issues down the road. Notice how God's favor is evidenced in the following verses starting at verse 17. *“As for these four youths, (it says) God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.”*

Now that's a beautiful verse because it talks about the favor of the Lord and the blessing of the Lord. But I have to tell you, and I have to note here that there are some people who actually believe that verse 17 is a direct result of eating vegetables and drinking only water. I have to, I'm sorry to announce that to you today, but it is in fact the case. I don't share that conclusion. I mean, vegetables are okay as long as there's ample ranch dip, but I don't, I, they don't make you smarter and stuff like that, or give you spiritual insight. These were the hand of the Lord on their lives and so forth.

So, goes on to say in verse 18, *“At the end of the time, (and that means the 3 years, so we've just jumped 3 years in this narrative) when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. (notice that their Hebrew names are still being used here) Therefore they stood before the king.”*

And so they, the king found those men particularly impressive and I find this particularly fascinating. Because they've just gone through 3 years of just being immersed in Babylonian culture and education in language and religion, and yet

these men are still faithful to God. And I think about that in terms of the young people we send to college today.

Sometimes we raise kids best we can and then we send them to college for 2 to 4 years and they come out with their faith decimated. And I'm thinking, huh, that's why. Why is that? These men have been inundated with Babylonian culture, which is really the opposite of what they should have learned concerning the Word of God, and yet these men have their faith intact.

Today we kind of like to talk about being in the world, but not of the world. That phrase that we use? "We are in the world, but we are not of the world." Well, I think that the way these men responded to their captivity gives us some new insights on that saying "in the world, not of the world." They were in Babylon, and they had to learn the language and learn the culture, learn the religion, but it never stuck, they were not of Babylon.

We're also told in verse 20, *"And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom."* Isn't it interesting? First of all, this is again, God's favor. He just, He blessed these guys with such insight and wisdom that the king noticed that they were so much wiser and more insightful.

But yet he continued to refer to them as the part of the group of his magicians and enchanters. Do you guys understand, those are occultic terms? Those are pagan terms related to the practice of the occult and that's you now. I mean, put yourself in Daniel's place. You love God with all your heart, you've spent 3 years inundated with all of this learning from Babylonian culture and you're called like an occultic priest. That's how you're seen, and yet you are a servant of the most-high God.

It's pretty fascinating because even though that's what they were called and it doesn't, we don't read anything here about them objecting to the title. There's nowhere that says, but Daniel said, don't you dare call me a magician or something like that, or enchanter. It's like, you know what? That's okay, that's your title, not mine. You get it?

There's wisdom and prudence in understanding which hills you're going to die on, or which concerns or issues you're going to fall on your sword over. All right, the final note of the chapter says, *"²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus."* Now you need to know that Cyrus was not a Babylonian king, he was the king of the Medo-Persian empire. Well, what are we talking

about here? We're being reminded of the fact that Daniel's ministry in the king's court lasted so long, that he was actually there when the Medo-Persian Empire overthrew the Babylonian empire.

And when we get to Daniel chapter 5, we're going to read about the night of the overthrow and it's pretty dramatic, it's pretty cool. And by the way, it happened in 539 B.C. just in case you're thinking of, where all this kind of fits on the chronological calendar. But Daniel, by the time, we're not really sure, but by the time the Jews were given the freedom to go back to their homeland and to first build, rebuild the temple, and then later on rebuild the walls of the city, Daniel was very likely in his 90s.

Now consider the fact that he was taken to Babylon when he was probably around 20. Well, that makes sense because you see, God had told the people of Israel through Jeremiah that their exile would last 70 years, and Daniel was there the whole time and he served faithfully. Did you hear that? He served pagan kings, but he served faithfully, but he was never unfaithful to his God.

And that makes Daniel a pretty impressive character for us to think about and to emulate and so forth. But that is where we're going to stop for tonight. We are going to pick up Daniel chapter 2 next time and believe me, it gets interesting as we go through these chapters because the challenges mount in terms of the testing of their faith. So there you go, let's go ahead and close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we thank you so much for giving us this time tonight in this first of our trips into the book of Daniel. We thank you Father for the things that we've seen because we're kind of living in a country that is becoming increasingly opposed to the things of the Lord and simply the wisdom of the Bible.

And we wonder how to deal with it, how to live, how are we going to live in a world that seems so opposed and so contrary to the faith that we hold so dear. And yet, Lord, we see this example of Daniel and we recognize that there's a way to be faithful to live faithfully for the Lord even in the most challenging of circumstances and to hold onto our faith and trust and to know Lord God, that you will never leave us nor forsake us.

So Lord, as we go through this study, the rest of the book of Daniel, we pray that you would continue to speak to us about how we might live like Daniel, how that we might live upright lives, honoring the Lord, walking in obedience to the impulse and of the Holy Spirit in our lives and yielding to Your Word

while at the same time living in a world that is very much like Babylon and very contrary to the ways of the Lord.

Teach us these things we pray. Help us to understand them, to go grow in the grace and knowledge of Your Word. We thank you for giving us this time together. We ask these things in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.