

**Daniel 1**  
**October 25, 2015**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

How did a 16-yr old Jewish boy named Daniel and his three friends who lived in Jerusalem end up in Babylon to be trained in the king's court?! How did that happen? What's the backstory? To help you appreciate our brand new study of Daniel, I need to take you all the way back to Deuteronomy! So hang with me!

God had made a covenant with Israel in Moab (Deut. 28–30) just before she entered the Promised Land (Deut. 29:1). In this covenant God set forth some basic ground rules. Their obedience to Him would bring blessing (Deut. 28:1–14) but disobedience to Him would bring discipline (Deut. 28:15–68). In this second portion God outlined the disciplines He would use to correct the people when their walk was out of line with His revealed Law. These disciplines would seek to conform them to His demands so they would be eligible for His blessings. The ultimate discipline He would use to correct His people was the invasion of Gentile nations who would subjugate them to their authority and disperse them from their land (Deut. 28:49–68).

Moses then came along (Deut. 30:1–10) and stated that when Israel would come under God's discipline, that discipline would not be lifted until the people forsook their sin, turned in faith to God, and obeyed His requirements. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had gone into captivity to Assyria in 722 b.c. This was the outworking of the principles of Deuteronomy 28. From time to time (though not consistently) the Southern Kingdom (Judah), in light of the fall of the Northern Kingdom, had heeded the prophets' admonitions and turned to God. The Southern Kingdom continued for more than a century longer because of her repentance and obedience under her godly kings.

That condition, however, did not last, and the prophet Jeremiah warned them. Judah had ignored God's covenant, neglected the Sabbath Day and the sabbatical year (Jer. 34:12–22), and committed idolatry (Jer. 7:30–31). Therefore, because of the covenant in Deuteronomy 28, judgment had to fall on Judah. God chose Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument to inflict discipline on God's disobedient people (cf. Jer. 27:6; Hab. 1:6). Jeremiah had warned Jehoiakim of impending invasion by Babylon. And Jehoiakim had heard of the prophet's instruction to God's people to submit to Babylon without resistance. So when Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city, little or no resistance was offered. Jehoiakim and the people of Judah were captured and taken to Babylon to come under Nebuchadnezzar's authority.

It was this capture and deportation of the Jews to Babylon that introduced an important prophetic time period - the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24)—began. The times of the Gentiles is that extended period of time in which the land given in covenant by God to Abraham and his descendants is occupied by Gentile powers and the Davidic throne is empty of any rightful heir in the Davidic line. The times of the Gentiles, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem in 605 B.C., will continue till the Messiah returns. Then Christ will subdue nations, deliver the land of Israel from its Gentile occupants, and bring the nation Israel into her

covenanted blessings in the millennial kingdom. This is why the book of Daniel is one of the most intriguing works in the Bible. Its stories are beautifully told and its visions are awe inspiring.

The first division of the book (chaps. 1–6) consists of historical material and some prophecy (chap. 2); the second division (chaps. 7–12) contains both history and apocalyptic messages. Daniel is the classic example of the apocalyptic genre. The term “apocalyptic” is derived from a Greek word, *apokalupsis*, “revelation, disclosure.” In this genre a divine revelation is given to a prophet through a divine mediator concerning future events. Symbolism and numerology are often employed. The major theme of apocalyptic messages is the future triumph of the kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the earth. Apocalyptic messages grant the world a glimpse of God and the future. We will this primarily in the last half of this book.

**Transition:** Today, we begin in Chapter 1 where we begin to learn the personal history of Daniel, who is a prophet. You will be very impressed with this young man! In fact, after our reading of Chapter 1, I believe all of us CAN stand firm in the hardest of trials BY trusting God that He has already gone before us in multiple kinds of WAYS. Let’s read chapter 1 and find the different WAYS that God went in advance of Daniel and his friends.

### **BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.1:

- In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

V.2:

- And 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.

V.3:

- Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—

V.4:

- young 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.

V.5:

- The 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.

V.6:

- Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

V.7:

- The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

V.8:

- But 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.

V.9:

- Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel,
- V.10:
- but 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.”
- V.11:
- Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,
- V.12:
- “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.
- V.13:
- 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.”
- V.14:
- So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.
- V.15:
- At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.
- V.16:
- So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.
- V.17:
- To 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.
- V.18:
- At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.
- V.19:
- The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.
- V.20:
- In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.
- V.21:
- And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.1-2: Remember that Jeremiah had already predicted this once the Israelites had rebelled against God. What is the first thing you notice regarding the Lord? [He facilitated the capture of Judah. He delivered them to Nebuchadnezzar.]

Observation: What is so intriguing is that our study of Romans taught us that when His chosen people rebelled against Him, he opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles. That means that from the beginning of time, God had planned all along to make the good news available to both Jews and Gentiles. So as I stated in my introduction, the capture and deportation of the Jews to

Babylon triggers “The Times of the Gentiles,” which was facilitated by a sovereign God who is simply pushing His love story to the end!

Q v.2: What do we know about Nebuchadnezzar’s faith system? [He serves a pagan god. He brought some valuable **articles from the temple** in Jerusalem which he placed in **the temple of his god in Babylonia** (cf. 2 Chron. 36:7). “His god” may have been Bel, also called Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonians (cf. comments on Dan. 4:8). (In Heb. the word rendered Babylonia is Shinar, NIV marg., an ancient name for that land.) This would signify the conquest of the God of Judah by the Babylonian deities.

Q v.2: Imagine being a teenager and being snatched from your home and moved to a faraway place. What would you be feeling? [fear, anxiety, grief, etc.]

Q v.3: Who is Ashpenaz and what was his role? [Chief of the Court officials – bring young men without defect, handsome, showing aptitude of every kind of learning, etc, to serve in the king’s palace. His job was to teach them the language and the literature of the Babylonians. Then he was to feed them and train them for three years]

Q: Can you imagine being forced to live in a new country and have to learn a foreign language and learn a new culture? Or does this look and feel more like a young man being drafted into the military when he didn’t want to go?

Q v.6-7: It’s obvious that Daniel and his three friends met the criteria the king was looking for. Why do you think King Nebuchadnezzar changed their names? He wanted these new names to be more like the heathen people with whom they were living and studying.

Point of Interest: Daniel and his friends were Jewish. Thus, each of their names had God’s name incorporated in their own name. King Nebuchadnezzar stripped them away. Here they are:

Daniel “God is my judge” now Belteshazzar (“Bel protect his life”). Bel was a Babylonian god.  
Hananiah “Jehovah is Gracious” became Shadrach (“the command of the moon god”)  
Mishael “Who is Like God?” became Meshach (“who is like Aku,” one of the heathen gods)  
Azariah “Jehovah is my helper” now Abed-nego (“the servant of Nego,” another heathen god)

Transition: So we know that Daniel and his friends have been deported and given new names. We know that Ashpenaz has an order from the king to feed and train these young men for the next three years. These young men are trying to acclimate themselves in a new culture who doesn’t follow God and speaks a different language. Now let’s look for the WAYS we see God having already gone ahead of them.

Q v.8: Apparently, Daniel had been apprised of the meal plan in advance! Once he heard it, how did he choose to handle it? [he resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal food and wine. But instead of being discourteous, he asked permission not to defile himself in this way.]

Q: Why do you think Daniel thought that the royal food would defile him? [He believed many things forbidden by the Jewish Law were served on the king’s table, so to eat their food would

defile them. Moreover, this royal food had been sacrificed and offered to pagan gods before it was offered to the king. To partake of such food would be contrary to Exodus 34:15, where the Jews were forbidden to eat flesh sacrificed to pagan gods.]

Q v.9-10: How did God go in advance of Daniel regarding his request to abstain from royal food? [God “caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel!]

Q: What was Ashpenaz’s concern if he granted Daniel his request? [The king would have his head if these youth looked worse than the other young men their age! He didn’t want to fail at fulfilling the king’s commands.]

Q v.11-14: How does Daniel meet Ashpenaz in the middle? [He asks for a 10-day test. He and his friends only wanted to eat vegetables and drink water and then be evaluated. He was open to the possibility that if they didn’t look better than the other youth, then they would have to succumb to the royal menu.]

Q v.15-16: Who looked better than all the other youth their age after ten days? [Daniel and company]

Q: How do you see God having gone in advance of the boys regarding the outcome of the 10-day test? [God honored their resolve and made sure they physically looked better!]

Q v.17: How do you see God having gone in advance of the boys in this verse? [“God gave them all that they needed – knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning! He enabled them to learn their lessons better than the other students, and He added to this knowledge His own spiritual wisdom. He quickened their knowledge and put them on the fast track! It’s as if they attended a three-year degree plan at the University of Babylon and was the valedictorian!]

Q v.18-21: When the three years were up, King Nebuchadnezzar assessed all the youth. What did he discover? [In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them **ten times better** than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom]

### **LOOK:**

No matter how difficult our trials are, we can take two truths from today’s lesson to see us through them:

1. Resolve to place your trust in God who is faithful to the end.
2. Remember that God goes in advance of us to help us find favor with others and provide whatever we need to accomplish His purposes within our trials.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Da 1)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

In the personal history of Daniel (chapters 1–6), we find three different times of difficulty: the testing of the four Hebrews when they arrived at Babylon (chap. 1); the fiery furnace (chap. 3); and the lions' den (chap. 6). In each of these experiences, Daniel and his friends won the victory, but the very first victory was the foundation for the other victories. Because these Jewish boys were faithful to God while they were yet teenagers, God was faithful to them in the years that followed.

#### **I. A Difficult Trial (1:1–7)**

Imagine four Hebrew boys, teenagers, being snatched from their lovely homes in Jerusalem and moved to faraway Babylon. Since all of them were princes, belonging to the royal family, they were probably not accustomed to this kind of treatment. It is too bad when the youth of the land must suffer because of the sins of the parents. The Jews had refused to repent and obey the Lord, so (as Jeremiah had warned) the Babylonian army came in 606–586 B.C. and conquered the land. It was their custom to take the best of the youths to Babylon for training in the king's court. In v. 3 we see what fine specimens these four lads were: they were physically strong and handsome, socially experienced and well-liked by others, mentally keen and well-educated, and spiritually devoted to the Lord. Their lives were balanced, as we see Christ's in Luke 2:52—perfect examples of teenagers!

But a difficult trial lay ahead of them: the king wanted to force them to conform to the ways of Babylon. He was not interested in putting good Jews to work; he wanted these Jews to be Babylonians! Christians today face the same trial: Satan wants us to become “conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:1–2). Sad to say, too many Christians give in to the world and lose their power, their joy, and their testimony. Note the changes that these young men experienced:

##### *A. A new home (vv. 1–2).*

No longer were they surrounded by the things of God in Jerusalem, and no longer would they have the influence of their godly parents and teachers. When some Christians get away from home, they rejoice at the opportunity to “let down the bars and live it up”; but not so with Daniel and his friends.

##### *B. New knowledge (vv. 3–4).*

The old Jewish wisdom had to go; from now on it would be the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of Babylon. They had to learn the wisdom and the language of their captors. The king hoped that this “brainwashing” would make better servants out of them. God's people often have to study things that do not agree with God's Word. Like Daniel and his friends, we should do our best but not abandon our faith.

##### *C. New diets (v. 5).*

For the next three years, the four youths were supposed to eat the king's diet, which, of course, was contrary to the dietary laws of the Jews. No doubt the food was also offered to the idols of the land, and for the Hebrew youths to eat it would be blasphemy.

#### *D. New names (vv. 6–7).*

The world does not like to recognize the name of God, yet each of the four boys had God's name in his own name. Daniel ("God is my judge") was changed to Belteshazzar ("Bel protect his life"). Bel was the name of a Babylonian god. Hananiah ("Jehovah is gracious") became Shadrach ("the command of the moon god"); Mishael ("Who is like God?") became Meshach ("who is like Aku," one of the heathen gods); and Azariah ("Jehovah is my helper") became Abed-nego ("the servant of Nego," another heathen god). The Babylonians hoped that these new names would help the youths forget their God and gradually become more like the heathen people with whom they were living and studying.

## **II. A Daring Test (1:8–16)**

The Babylonians could change Daniel's home, textbooks, menu, and name, but they could not change his heart. He and his friends purposed in their hearts that they would obey God's Word; they refused to become conformed to the world. Of course, they could have made excuses and "gone along with" the crowd. They might have said, "Everybody's doing it!" or "We had better obey the king!" or "We'll obey on the outside but keep our faith privately." But they did not compromise. They dared to believe God's Word and trust God for victory. They had surrendered their bodies and minds to the Lord, as Rom. 12:1–2 instructs, and they were willing to let God do the rest.

Daniel asked for a ten-day test, which was not very long considering that they had three years of training ahead of them; the head servant agreed with their plan. "When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). See also Matt. 6:33 and Prov. 22:1. The servant was afraid to change the king's orders, lest anything happen to the youths and to himself, so Daniel's proposed test was a good solution to the problem. Of course, God honored their faith. The boys were fed vegetables (pulse) and water for ten days, thus avoiding the defiled food of the Babylonians. At the end of the test, the four lads were healthier and more handsome than the other students who ate from the king's table.

It takes faith and obedience to overcome the temptations and pressures of the world. First Corinthians 10:13 had not yet been written, but Daniel and his three friends knew its truth by experience. Note how polite and kind Daniel was to the Babylonian servant; he did not "parade" his religion or embarrass the man. This is a good example for us to follow: we may hold to our convictions without becoming cranks!

## **III. Divine Triumph (1:17–21)**

A test for ten days is one thing, but what about the three-year course at the University of Babylon? The answer is in v. 17: "God gave them ..." all that they needed! He enabled them to learn their lessons better than the other students, and He added to this knowledge His own spiritual wisdom. The "magicians and astrologers" in v. 20 were the men of the kingdom who studied the stars and sought to determine what decisions the king should make. They also claimed to interpret dreams. Certainly Daniel and his friends did not believe the foolish religion

and practices of the Babylonians, but they studied just the same, just as a Christian student must do when he attends a university today and is told to learn “facts” that he knows are contrary to God’s Word. Daniel understood that God would use him as a witness in that godless place—and He did that for the next seventy-five years!

The king himself had to admit that the four Hebrew lads were ten times smarter than his best advisers. Of course, this kind of reputation made the astrologers envious, and it is no wonder they tried to do away with the Jews in later years. If Daniel had been worried about pleasing people and being “popular,” he would have yielded to the pressures and failed the Lord. But because he lived to please the Lord, he ignored the faces and threats of people and did the thing God wanted him to do. We need Christians today who will purpose in their hearts to put Christ first in everything—in the dining room, in the classroom, and even in the throne room!

“And Daniel continued . . .” What a testimony! Satan must have said to Daniel, “You had better follow the crowd if you want to stay around here.” But Daniel obeyed the Lord—and he “stayed around” longer than anyone else. He ministered under four kings and probably lived to see the Jews return to their land at the end of the captivity. “He who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). In fact, we today are being blessed and helped because of Daniel’s faithfulness. Had he failed God when he faced tests in his youth, Daniel would never have enjoyed the victories and blessings of the later years. He was called “beloved” (10:11), an honor given in the Bible only to one other—Jesus Christ. Because he lived in the will of God, Daniel enjoyed the love of God (1 John 2:15–17). His consecration gave him courage; his faith made him faithful.

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 1328–1332). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

Personal History of Daniel (chap. 1)

A. *Daniel’s deportation (1:1–7)*

1:1–2a. The first two verses of the Book of Daniel state when and how the prophet was taken to Babylon. The events in the book began **in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah**. This seems to conflict with Jeremiah’s statement that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim’s reign (Jer. 25:1). At least two explanations may be given for this apparent discrepancy. The first is the difference between Jewish and Babylonian reckoning. The Jewish calendar began the year in Tishri (September–October) while the Babylonian calendar began in the spring in the month of Nisan (March–April). If Babylonian reckoning were used, the year Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem was the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign. But if the Jewish reckoning were used it was Jehoiakim’s third year. Daniel, a Jew, may well have adopted the familiar Jewish calendar.

A second explanation is based on the Babylonian method of reckoning the dates of a king’s reign. The portion of a king’s reign that preceded the beginning of a new year in the month Nisan, that is, the year of accession, was called the first year even if it was of short duration. If Jeremiah followed that method of reckoning, he counted Jehoiakim’s year of accession (which was only part of a full year) as the first year. And if Daniel used the Jewish method of reckoning (which did *not* count the first months of a king’s reign before the new year) he then counted only the three full years of Jehoiakim’s reign. The year was 605 B.C.



Daniel referred to **Nebuchadnezzar** (whose name means “Nabu has protected my inheritance”) as **king of Babylon**. At that time (605) Nabopolassar was king in Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar had not yet acceded to the throne. However, Nebuchadnezzar, while in battle, heard of the death of his father and hastened to Babylon to be enthroned (see “Historical Background” in the *Introduction*). Writing at a later date, Daniel referred to Nebuchadnezzar as king in anticipation of his occupation of the throne.

Nebuchadnezzar’s besieging of **Jerusalem** took place during the reign of **Jehoiakim**, the 17th **king of Judah** and eldest son of Josiah (cf. 2 Chron. 36:2 with 2 Chron. 36:5). Jehoiakim’s younger brother Jehoahaz had been placed on Judah’s throne after Pharaoh Neco killed King Josiah in 609 B.C. (See the chart “The Last Five Kings of Judah,” near 2 Kings 23:31–35.) But Neco dethroned Jehoahaz and placed Jehoiakim on the throne (2 Chron. 36:3–4).

Jeremiah had warned Jehoiakim of impending invasion by Babylon. And Jehoiakim had heard of the prophet’s instruction to God’s people to submit to Babylon without resistance. So when Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city, little or no resistance was offered, and Jehoiakim was captured and taken to Babylon. Thus Judah came under Nebuchadnezzar’s authority.

With this incursion by Nebuchadnezzar an important prophetic time period—the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24)—began. The times of the Gentiles is that extended period of time in which the land given in covenant by God to Abraham and his descendants is occupied by Gentile powers and the Davidic throne is empty of any rightful heir in the Davidic line. The times of the Gentiles, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Jerusalem in 605 B.C., will continue till the Messiah returns. Then Christ will subdue nations, deliver the land of Israel from its Gentile occupants, and bring the nation Israel into her covenanted blessings in the millennial kingdom.

God had made a covenant with Israel in Moab (Deut. 28–30) just before she entered the land (Deut. 29:1). In this covenant God set forth the principle by which He would deal with His people. Their obedience to Him would bring blessing (Deut. 28:1–14) but disobedience to Him would bring discipline (Deut. 28:15–68). In this second portion God outlined the disciplines He would use to correct the people when their walk was out of line with His revealed Law. These disciplines would seek to conform them to His demands so they would be eligible for His blessings. The ultimate discipline He would use to correct His people was the invasion of Gentile nations who would subjugate them to their authority and disperse them from their land (Deut. 28:49–68).

Moses then stated when Israel would come under God’s discipline, that discipline would not be lifted until the people forsook their sin, turned in faith to God, and obeyed His requirements (Deut. 30:1–10). The Northern Kingdom of Israel had gone into captivity to Assyria in 722 B.C. This was the outworking of the principles of Deuteronomy 28. From time to time (though not consistently) the Southern Kingdom (Judah), in light of the fall of the Northern Kingdom, had heeded the prophets’ admonitions and turned to God. The Southern Kingdom continued for more than a century longer because of her repentance and obedience under her godly kings.

That condition, however, did not last. Judah also ignored God’s covenant, neglected the Sabbath Day and the sabbatical year (Jer. 34:12–22), and went into idolatry (Jer. 7:30–31). Therefore, because of the covenant in Deuteronomy 28, judgment had to fall on Judah. God chose Nebuchadnezzar as the instrument to inflict discipline on God’s disobedient people (cf. Jer. 27:6; Hab. 1:6).

1:2b–3. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon from this invasion of Judah, he brought spoils to signify Judah’s submission to Babylon. First, he brought some valuable **articles from the temple** in Jerusalem which he placed in **the temple of his god in Babylonia** (cf. 2 Chron.

36:7). “His god” may have been Bel, also called Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonians (cf. comments on Dan. 4:8). (In Heb. the word rendered Babylonia is Shinar, NIV marg., an ancient name for that land; cf. Gen. 10:10; 11:2; 14:1; Isa. 11:11, NIV marg.; Zech. 5:11, NIV marg.) This would signify the conquest of the God of Judah by the Babylonian deities.

Second, Nebuchadnezzar brought with him **some of the Israelites (Jews) from the royal family and the nobility**. As stated in the *Introduction*, these royal princes may have been considered hostages, to help assure Judah’s continued submission to Babylon. Or they may have been taken to Babylon to prepare them to fulfill positions of administrative leadership there if Nebuchadnezzar should have to return to subjugate Judah. **Ashpenaz** was **chief of the court officials**. He is mentioned by name only here in the Old Testament but is called “the official” or “the chief official” six times (Dan. 1:7–11, 18). It is not clear whether the word for “official” (*sārīs*) means a eunuch or simply a courtier or court officer. Kitchen suggests it meant eunuch in Daniel’s time (Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1966, pp. 165–6).

1:4–5. These captives were choice **young men** both physically and mentally and as such, they could be an asset to **the king’s palace**. An attempt was made to assimilate them into the culture of the court for they were compelled to learn both **the language and the literature** of the people among whom they now dwelt. They were to undergo a rigorous **three-year** course of training **after** which **they were to enter the king’s service**. That educational program probably included a study of agriculture, architecture, astrology, astronomy, law, mathematics, and the difficult Akkadian language.

1:6–7. No mention was made of how many captives were taken but four are mentioned here by name because of their later significant role in Babylon. Because all four bore names that honored Yahweh, the God of Israel, their names were changed. *El* means God and *-iah* (or *-yah*) is an abbreviation for Yahweh, thus suggesting that the young men’s parents were God-fearing people who gave them names that included references to God. **Daniel**, whose name means “God has judged” (or “God is my Judge”), was given the name **Beltshazzar** (*Bēlet-šar-ušur* in Akk.), which means “Lady, protect the king.” Eight of the 10 times “Beltshazzar” occurs in the Old Testament are in the Aramaic section of the Book of Daniel (2:26; 4:8–9, 18–19 [3 times]; 5:12). The other 2 occurrences are in 1:7 and 10:1.

**Hananiah** (“Yahweh has been gracious”) became **Shadrach** probably from the Akkadian verb form *šādurāku*, meaning “I am fearful (of a god).”

**Mishael** (“Who is what God is?”) was given the name **Meshach**, which possibly was from the Akkadian verb *mēšāku*, meaning “I am despised, contemptible, humbled (before my god).”

**Azariah** (“Yahweh has helped”) was named **Abednego**, “Servant of Nebo” (Nego being a Heb. variation of the Babylonian name of the god Nebo). Nebo (cf. Isa. 46:1), son of Bel, was the Babylonian god of writing and vegetation. He was also known as Nabu (cf. comments on Dan. 1:1 on Nebuchadnezzar’s name).

Thus **the chief court official** (Ashpenaz, v. 3) seemed determined to obliterate any testimony to the God of Israel from the Babylonian court. The names he gave the four men signified that they were to be subject to Babylon’s gods.

## B. Daniel’s devotion to God (1:8–16)

### 1. THE REQUEST (1:8)

1:8. Nebuchadnezzar had made abundant provision for the captives. Theirs was a life of luxury, not deprivation, for they were given a portion of **food and wine** daily from the king's own table. However, this food did not conform to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. The fact that it was prepared by Gentiles rendered it unclean. Also no doubt many things forbidden by the Law were served on the king's table, so to partake of such food would defile the Jewish youths. Further, without doubt this royal food had been sacrificed and offered to pagan gods before it was offered to the king. To partake of such food would be contrary to Exodus 34:15, where the Jews were forbidden to eat flesh sacrificed to pagan gods.

Similar problems would arise in drinking the wine. To abstain from the Old Testament prohibition against "strong drink" (e.g., Prov. 20:1, KJV; Isa. 5:11, "drinks"), Jews customarily diluted wine with water. Some added 3 parts of water to wine, others 6 parts, and some as much as 10 parts of water to 1 part of wine. The Babylonians did not dilute their wine. So both the food and the drink would have defiled these Jewish young men. **Daniel** knew the requirements of the Law governing what he should and should not eat and drink.

Daniel's desire was to please God in all he did. So he **resolved** that even though he was not in his own land but in a culture that did not follow God's laws, he would consider himself under the Law. **He** therefore **asked the chief court official** to be excused from eating and drinking the food and wine generously supplied by the king. Daniel was courageous, determined, and obedient to God.

## 2. THE REQUEST GRANTED (1:9–14)

1:9–10. The chief official's reticence to grant Daniel's request is understandable. He was responsible to oversee the young captives' physical and mental development so they would become prepared for the roles **the king** had in mind for them. Evidently these youths held a strategic place in the king's plans, so he wanted them well trained. If the men had been of little consequence to **the king**, their physical conditions would not have mattered and Ashpenaz would not have risked the loss of his life.

**Daniel** had trusted his situation to God who intervened on Daniel's behalf to move the official's heart **to show favor** (*hesed*, "loyal love") **and sympathy** (*rahāmîm*, "compassion") **to Daniel**.

1:11–14. When Daniel's request seemed to have been denied by **the chief official ... Daniel** approached **the guard whom**. Ashpenaz placed over the four youths and requested a **10-day** trial period in which **Daniel** and his companions would be given only **vegetables ... and water**. (The Heb. word for vegetables, meaning "sown things," may also include grains.) Since the Mosaic Law designated no vegetables as unclean, Daniel could eat any vegetables put before him without defiling himself. In so short a time (**10 days**) there could have been no marked deterioration that would jeopardize the life of anyone in authority. In fact Daniel hinted that their **appearance** would be better than that of the others who were on the king's diet.

Since the guard was under the chief official's authority he must have acted not on his own but with permission from Ashpenaz. This indicates that God intervenes on behalf of those who trust Him, and protects and preserves those who obey Him, even under pagan rule.

## 3. THE RESULT (1:15–16)

1:15–16. **At the conclusion of the 10 days**, the four who had lived on vegetables appeared **healthier** than those who had dined on the king's **food**. Since the four looked better—and not

worse than the others, as Ashpenaz had feared (v. 10)—he did not object to the diet Daniel had requested for himself and his friends. So they were allowed to continue on a diet of **vegetables**.

Though God did not prohibit eating meat altogether (cf. Gen. 9:3; Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 10:25–26), the vegetable diet was superior to the king’s food. Also this shows that God blesses those who obey His commands and prospers those who trust Him. This incident would have been a lesson for the nation Israel. God had demanded obedience to the Law. Punishment came because of disobedience but even during a time of discipline, God protects and sustains those who obey Him and trust Him for their sustenance.

### C. Daniel’s appointment (1:17–21)

1:17. **These four ... men** being prepared by Nebuchadnezzar for positions of responsibility in the royal court were actually being prepared by God. For **God gave them knowledge and understanding** in many realms. “Knowledge” has to do with reasoning skills and thought processes. They were able to think clearly and logically. “Understanding” has to do with insight. This points up their ability to discern the nature of things clearly and to interpret them in their true light. The **literature and learning** in which God gave them ability was broad (cf. comments on v. 4). By divine enablement and through his years of instruction under able teachers, **Daniel** gained a wide knowledge of arts and sciences.

Though the knowledge of others in Babylon in those subjects may have equaled that of Daniel, he was superior to them all in one area: he had the God-given ability to **understand visions and dreams**. People have always been curious about the future and have sought to predict coming events. For example, after Israel entered the land of Canaan, they encountered many who attempted to prognosticate the future by various means. But Israel was forbidden to follow any of these practices (Deut. 18:9–13), which were also prevalent in Babylon.

1:18–21. **At the end of the time set by the king** (i.e., at the end of the three years’ training; cf. v. 5), **the king** examined **Daniel** and his three companions and **found** that **none** equaled them. In fact they were **10 times better than all** who practiced the arts of divination. (On **magicians** and **enchanters**, see comments on v. 17.) “Ten times” is an idiom meaning “many times” (cf. Gen. 31:7, 41; Num. 14:22; Job 19:3).

The king consulted magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, astrologers, wise men, and diviners. “Magicians” (*ḥarṭūmmîm*, Dan. 1:20; 2:2) was a general word referring to men who practiced the occult. (This word is also used in Gen. 41:8, 24; Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18–19; 9:11.) “Enchanters” (*’aššāpîm*, used only twice in the OT, Dan. 1:20; 2:21) may refer to those who used incantations in exorcisms. The word “sorcerers” (*meḳaššepîm*, 2:2) probably is from the Akkadian verb *kašāpu*, “to bewitch, to cast a spell.” (This participial noun, rendered “sorcerers,” used only here in Dan., occurs only four other times in the OT: Ex. 7:11; 22:18; Deut. 18:10; Mal. 3:5.) “Astrologers” (Heb., *kašdîm*, Dan. 2:2, 4; Aram., *kašdā’în*, 2:5, 10 [twice]; 3:8; 5:7, 11) seems to refer to a priestly class in the Babylonian religion (misleadingly rendered “Chaldeans” in the KJV) who depended on revelation through the stars, which were objects of worship. “Diviners” (*gāzerîn*, 2:27; 4:7; 5:7, 11) may be those who sought to ascertain or decree the fate of others.

The practices of these five groups may have overlapped extensively. Several times Daniel referred to these men under the general rubric of “wise men” (2:12–14, 18, 24 [twice], 48; 4:6, 18; 5:7–8, 15).

Daniel’s ministry in the royal court of Babylon continued until the overthrow of the Babylonian Empire by **Cyrus** in 539 B.C. God had said, “Those who honor Me, I will honor” (1 Sam. 2:30). **Daniel** determined to honor God even though he was living where people did not

have the high standards God demanded. And God honored Daniel's obedience to the Law and promoted him in the king's court. This incident would have reminded Israel that obedience brings blessing and that righteousness is a prerequisite for enjoying the covenanted blessings.

The fact that God gave Daniel the ability to understand and interpret visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17) meant that throughout Nebuchadnezzar's long reign he depended on Daniel for understanding future events, revealed through dreams and visions. This anticipated the ministry Israel will one day fulfill. God had set Israel apart to be a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). As such they were God's light to the world (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). They were to receive God's revelation and communicate it to nations that were ignorant of God. They were continually reminded of their role by the lampstand erected in the tabernacle. Daniel, during his tenure in the royal court in Babylon, fulfilled that function as God's spokesman to the Gentiles. When Israel will enter her millennial blessing under the reign of the Messiah, she will fulfill the role for which she was set apart by God and will then communicate God's truth to the Gentiles (Zech. 8:21–23).

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1267 – 1269). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**1:1** Some commentators deny the historicity of this invasion, yet Babylonian documents record that Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish in late spring of 605 B.C. and quickly subdued northern Syria. Immediate threats against Egyptian allies such as Judah's king Jehoiakim (2 Kg 23:34) would be expected, and the Babylonian priest-historian Berosus (c. 300 B.C.) reported that Nebuchadnezzar took Jewish captives in his 605 B.C. campaign (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.19). Jeremiah dates the battle of Carchemish to Jehoiakim's fourth year (Jr 46:2), whereas Daniel (Dn 1:1) places the siege of Jerusalem, which took place shortly after that battle, in Jehoiakim's third year. During this period the Jews used both the Babylonian spring and Judean fall calendars (cp. Ezk 29:17; 30:20; 32:17 where the "first month" reflects a spring new year). The months between Nisan (March–April) and Tishri (September–October) 605 B.C., when the events took place, fell in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign according to the Babylonian calendar but were still in Jehoiakim's third year following the Judean system. Nebuchadnezzar was crowned "king of Babylon" subsequent to the siege of Jerusalem, but Daniel wrote after Nebuchadnezzar's coronation and likely spoke of the king's position from the standpoint of a later time (also Jr 46:2). Moreover, a Jewish writer could appropriately refer to the crown prince as king because father-son co-regencies were commonplace in Judah.

In the Hebrew Bible, this book is not in the Prophets section but the Writings section, following the five "Scrolls" or megillot (Ru, Sg, Ec, Lm, Est).

**1:2** By the use of the title "Lord" (Hb *'adonai*, "owner, ruler, sovereign"), Daniel emphasized the sovereignty of his God, the dominant theme of the book. References to Daniel's "God" throughout the prophecy read "the God" (lit. "from the house of the God") in the Hebrew-Aramaic text, apparently to underscore that Yahweh was the true God and Babylon's deities were merely lifeless idols. The consistent use of the prefixed definite article when referring to Israel's God is further evidence of the book's literary unity.

**1:3** A century and a half earlier, Isaiah warned Hezekiah that some of his descendants would be carted off as officials to Babylon (Is 39:7)—an amazing example of fulfilled prophecy.

**1:5** Tablets listing the provisions allotted to the exiled King Jehoiachin (2 Kg 25:30; Jr 52:34) have been uncovered in Babylon and corroborate Daniel's testimony that captives were assigned royal rations. The Babylonian training period of three years was apparently similar to that of the Persians. Plato wrote that Persian youths began their education when 14 (*Alcibiades* 1.121), and Xenophon testified that they finished when 16 or 17 (*Cyropaedia* 1.2.8). According to the Persian *Avesta*, a Zoroastrian scripture, a student trained with a religious teacher for three years.

**1:6** Omission of the fathers' names of Daniel and his friends was not a failure in historical accuracy. The fathers' names of Habakkuk, Haggai, and many others whose historicity is beyond dispute are not disclosed.

**1:7** Dual names were not uncommon in ancient times. Pharaoh assigned Joseph an Egyptian name (Gn 41:45), and Hadassah is better known by her Persian name, Esther (Est 2:7).

**1:8** Critics who consider Daniel a fictional story from a later time maintain that this moral test reflects the pressure to forsake the Mosaic dietary laws during the reign of the Seleucid (see Dn 2:31–43) ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163 B.C.), who attempted to stamp out Judaism in the Syrian Empire. Dietary laws were an issue during these persecutions (1 Maccabees 1:62–63), but keeping kosher practices when in foreign lands has been a challenge for Jewish people from the sixth century B.C. onward.

**1:15** The improvement in the Hebrew youths' appearance after only 10 days may be attributed to God's special intervention, or to their improved diet through following His directives in the Torah.

**1:18** In the ancient texts, usually in Jr, and always in Ezk, the Babylonian king's name is spelled Nebuchadrezzar (with an r). In Dn, 2 Kg, Jr (8 times), 1 and 2 Ch, Ezr, Neh, and Est the spelling is Nebuchadnezzar (with an "n"). The rendition with an "r" is closer to the Babylonian name, Nabu-kudurri-usur ("O Nabu [the god], protect the offspring/boundary,"). For this reason some critics deem the spelling Nebuchadnezzar in Dn incorrect. However, the change from "r" in Akkadian and Aramaic to "n" in Hebrew was an accepted literary practice.

**1:21** Some commentators allege that this verse is saying that Daniel died in the first year of Cyrus, in contradiction to 10:1 which reports that Daniel was living in Cyrus's third year. But this verse says nothing of Daniel's death. It simply notes that Daniel was still alive in the first year of King Cyrus, perhaps emphasizing that he survived his Babylonian masters.