

Daniel 1

- The book of Daniel is the foremost book of prophecy in the Old Testament
 - What the book of Revelation is to the New Testament canon, the book of Daniel is to the Old Testament canon
 - The prophecies of Daniel reveal more future events, in exceptional detail and in greater concentration, than any other book of the Bible
 - Daniel explains how God's plan for Israel, God's plan for the Gentile nations and God's plan for His coming Kingdom unite in history
 - In fact, without the book of Daniel, it would be literally impossible to understand the rest of biblical prophecy, much less God's program for history
 - Therefore, a proper understanding of all prophecy hinges on obtaining a proper understanding of the book of Daniel
 - Daniel is particularly important for its comprehensive unveiling of the political future of the major powers on the earth
 - The book accurately predicts the rise and fall of world empires spanning thousands of years of human history
 - Its predictions about coming world empires were so accurate that biblical critics in the 18th century concluded the book must be a forgery
 - These men (who denied the existence of prophecy in the Bible) proposed that Daniel was written during the Maccabean period, years after the events in the book had already come to pass
 - But the book's undeniable historical accuracy is *not* the result of a human hoax
 - It's the power and wisdom of God revealed through a prophet
 - Because when your source happens to be the Author of human history, perfect accuracy is to be expected
 - The Lord wanted Daniel to relay his perfect insight to us, so we might understand God's purposes in appointing the rise and fall of nations

- The book is like a roadmap, explaining historical signposts and intersections of peoples
 - Daniel is also our “decoder ring” for interpreting Revelation, as these are the only two apocalyptic books in the Bible
 - Daniel explains many critical events of the end times not addressed by any other book of the Bible
 - Which explains why Daniel is the most-quoted OT book of prophecy by the NT authors
 - Finally, Daniel contains more fulfilled prophecies than any other book of the Bible
- Daniel can also be classified into “twos”, divided in several ways
 - First, the book is divided by two languages
 - Chapters 2-7 were written originally in Aramaic, the common language of the Near East and the Babylonian empire
 - Chapters 1, and 8-12 were written in Hebrew, the language spoken only by the Jewish people
 - Daniel’s choice to use different languages also tells us that the book was written to two audiences
 - At the time of Daniel’s writing, Judah was living in captivity in Babylon, so the Jewish people learned both languages
 - But the Babylonians could only understand their native Aramaic
 - Furthermore, Daniel was the only Jewish prophet who delivered his prophecies to a Gentile employer, rather than directly to the Jewish people
 - Therefore, we conclude that the chapters written in Aramaic were intended by Daniel to be understood by both Jews and Babylonians
 - While the Hebrew chapters were directed to the Jews alone
 - Thirdly, the book has two messages
 - First, Daniel explains God’s future plan for Israel in delivering the promised Kingdom, but only after a period of judgment

- Secondly, Daniel demonstrated how God's people are to live in faith even now while they await the Kingdom
- Finally, the book has two themes:
 - The first theme is the sovereignty of God, as evidenced by His control over the rise and fall of earthly powers according to His timetable
 - God will ultimately triumph over evil, even if for a time, it appears that evil has the upper hand
 - The second theme is God's grace for His people, as evidenced by His response to their prayers and His faithfulness to His promises
 - At various points in the book, God responds to prayer, reminding us that even as God is writing history, He gives attention to our place within it
- Normally, we would spend some time introducing our study with more background on the author and his circumstances
 - But fortunately, the opening chapter of Daniel is an introduction of its own, so we begin there

Dan. 1:1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Dan. 1:2 The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

Dan. 1:3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles,

Dan. 1:4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

Dan. 1:5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service.

Dan. 1:6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Dan. 1:7 Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Beltshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

- Daniel dates his writing in a precise manner
 - Daniel is a book of prophecy that anticipates important events in history
 - Prophets earn their credibility based on the accuracy of their predictions
 - Daniel's predictions were so specific, it's critically important for Daniel that we understand he wrote before the events came to pass
 - He also wants us to know how he came to possess his ability to foresee history so clearly
 - So he establishes up front that he wrote these things before they came to pass, which means the knowledge came from God
 - Jewish prophets dated their writings by the reign of Jewish kings
 - And Daniel dates his story to the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah
 - The third year of Jehoiakim's reign corresponds to 605 BC
- In that year, a Babylonian prince named Nebuchadnezzar led the army of his father, Nabopolassar, against two enemies: Assyria and Egypt
 - Assyria had been the dominant world power in the Near East for centuries
 - The Assyrian kingdom stretched from Mesopotamia to the Arabian desert
 - Assyria had conquered the great power of Egypt, making the Pharaoh and his people Assyria's vassal
 - Assyria had also conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, as God appointed scattering those ten tribes
 - But now, Babylon was gaining power and challenging Assyria for world supremacy
 - Five years earlier, in 609 BC, Assyria and Egypt fought together to retake the Assyrian capital of Harran from Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army who had seized it

- As the Egyptian army traveled north up the Via Maris (the way by the sea) through Judah to meet up with the Assyrians at Haran, they suddenly found their path blocked by the Judean army
 - King Josiah had massed his forces at Megiddo in the Jezreel valley, seeking to destroy the Egyptian army before it reached Haran
 - Since Assyria was in decline, and Egypt was weakened from years of Assyrian domination, Josiah thought he saw his chance to free Judah from Egyptian oppression
- As the Egyptians and Judeans confronted one another in the valley, the Pharaoh Neco, who was leading his army, issued a warning to Josiah not to interfere
 - That moment is captured in 2 Chronicles 35

2 Chr. 35:20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt came up to make war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him.

2 Chr. 35:21 But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? I am not coming against you today but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from interfering with God who is with me, so that He will not destroy you."

2 Chr. 35:22 However, Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to make war with him; nor did he listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to make war on the plain of Megiddo.

2 Chr. 35:23 The archers shot Josiah, and the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded."

2 Chr. 35:24 So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in the second chariot which he had, and brought him to Jerusalem where he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

- As 2 Chronicles explains, the Egyptian Pharaoh, Neco, warned Josiah to go home and not interfere
 - Interestingly, Neco tells Josiah that the Lord Himself was directing Neco's steps into battle
 - Furthermore, Neco says that God Himself will destroy Josiah if he gets in the way
 - Here's a Jewish king receiving a word from Israel's God from the mouth of a Gentile enemy

- God was at work bringing nations against one another for His own purposes in the world
- And He graciously allowed Josiah the opportunity to step back from acting outside God's will
- Regrettably, Josiah would not listen to the "mouth of God" referring to the words spoken by Neco
 - So Josiah decides to attack anyway, contrary to God's wishes
 - As a result, God lets Josiah die in the battle
 - And then the Egyptians proceeded north into the battle against the Babylonians
- The Assyrians and Neco failed to recapture Haran in 609 BC, so the Egyptians returned to Egypt, passing through Judah once more
 - During the three months Neco was battling at Haran, the people of Israel had appointed Josiah's son, Joahaz, as king
 - Three months later, Neco returned to Judah and deposed Joahaz
 - Neco placed his brother, Jehoiakim, on the throne, since he was willing to submit to Egyptian authority
 - Jehoiakim, became king in 608 BC
 - He ruled three years under Egyptian authority, until 605 BC
 - In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar arrived at Jerusalem, having conquered Assyria at Carchemish
 - When Nebuchadnezzar arrived, he took control of Judea
 - He robbed the temple of some of its artifacts
 - And he took captive some Jewish nobles and royalty
 - Nebuchadnezzar's policy was to bring the best of whatever kingdom he conquered to the capital, to strengthen his court
 - In this case, removing the nobles helped ensure the loyalty of King Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar left in power to rule under Babylonian authority
- One of the nobles taken at that time was a young boy named Daniel

- Notice how Daniel describes these nobles
 - In v.4, Daniel uses the word “youths”
 - The word in Hebrew describes a young boy, maybe barely a teenager
 - In v.5, Daniel says he was to be trained for three years before entering the king’s service
 - Plato reports that education of Persian court servants began at about age 14 and continued until 17, when they would assume a role in the court
 - So it seems that Daniel was probably age 14 when taken to Babylon
- These young men were the best and brightest of Israel, which is why Nebuchadnezzar wanted them in his court
 - They were physically strong, intelligent, discerning, and therefore appropriate for royal service
 - Wonder if Daniel included these details merely to compliment himself?
 - No, Daniel was explaining his opportunity to accomplish amazing things on behalf of the Lord in Babylon
- It’s one of the great ironies of the book that Daniel was virtually unknown when he lived in Israel, yet he becomes one of the greatest men for Israel’s enemy, Babylon
 - His rise to prominence was the result of God elevating him, of course
 - But, his personal traits were also essential in his story
 - Daniel was a man of character, intelligence and discernment
 - These traits become tools in God’s hand to accomplish great things for His glory
- Now we often remember 1 Corinthians 1, where Paul says the Lord uses the weak things of the world so that He might be seen to be strong
 - But let’s not misunderstand Paul’s teaching

- God does choose to work through the weak and inconspicuous, but He elevates men and women of strong character
- He accomplishes the impossible with the least
- Yet He favors those who are faithful, devoted and spiritually mature
- So don't confuse God's preference for humility or obscurity as indifference to our spiritual strength
 - Daniel may have been but a child, but he was a spiritual giant among men
 - And if we have a desire to be useful to God, we can't ignore the importance of being ready for any opportunity
 - To be prepared in our character, knowledge of Scripture and spiritual maturity
- Finally, notice how Daniel's position in the court of Israel's enemy, Babylon, parallels the experiences of Joseph and Moses
 - Like Daniel, those men became instruments in God's hand to rescue God's people
 - And they were useful in that way, precisely because God caused them to rise to prominence in the court of a foreign king
 - And even before that moment, they each spent time learning the culture and politics of the foreign realm
 - It reminds us that God has placed each of us in a certain place and culture for a reason, so that we might understand it and work within it
 - And by that work, we might minister to the people of God for the glory of God
- At the end of v.4, Daniel says the king wanted these boys trained in the literature and language of the Chaldeans
 - The word "Chaldean" can refer either to the Babylonian culture, or it can refer specifically to the profession of astrologers and magicians
 - The magicians of Babylon were the keepers of all science and ancient knowledge

- These “Chaldeans” were society’s experts in natural science, mathematics, medicine, history, and astrology
- In v.4, Daniel is using the word “Chaldean” to refer both to the culture of the Babylonians and to the profession of magician
 - Daniel was going to become an expert in all these things
 - Leading him to eventually rise to become the leader of the magi in Babylon
- Among those taken in his group were Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah
 - Josephus reported that Daniel and these three boys were all relatives in the family of Zedekiah, the final king of Judah
 - As was customary, these boys were assigned new, Aramaic names
 - New names were especially necessary in the case of these four, since all four of their Hebrew names incorporated a reference to Israel’s God
 - “El” means “God” and “iah” is short for “Yahweh”
 - Daniel is renamed Belteshazzar, which may refer to the wife of the chief Babylonian god, Marduk
 - “Shadrach” may mean “I Am of Little Account”
 - And “Abednego” may mean “Servant of Nebo” (a god of Babylon)
 - Changing a person’s name signified they were now part of a new people, a new culture, and it served to cut ties with their past
 - The king wanted these young men to see themselves as part of Babylonian society
 - But the Jewish people have never been completely assimilated into Gentile culture, because the Lord is preserving His people
 - So changing names wasn’t going to change Daniel and his friends
- Finally, notice in v.5, that the king wanted to ensure these men had access to the best in the land to strengthen them for studies and service

- So Nebuchadnezzar commanded the boys be fed from the king's table, which meant first-class dining
 - That sounds great to us, of course
 - It seems the Lord is blessing Daniel already, allowing him to receive this choice menu, even as he lives in captivity
 - But this is not a good situation for a faithful Jew living under the Law
- Daniel and his friends are obligated by the Old Covenant to observe certain dietary restrictions, especially regarding the preparation and type of meat and drink served
 - It's highly likely the meat the king served was not kosher
 - And it was likely sacrificed to Babylonian idols
 - Daniel and his friends may have been required to pour out a cup of wine as an offering to a false god at the table before drinking
 - So if Daniel and his friends partake of the king's table, they must violate the Law's requirements and pay homage to foreign gods
- This sets up the first conflict between Daniel's convictions in service to God and the king's authority

Dan. 1:8 But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.

Dan. 1:9 Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials,

Dan. 1:10 and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."

Dan. 1:11 But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,

Dan. 1:12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.

Dan. 1:13 "Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

Dan. 1:14 So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days.

- This confrontation begins as all such conflicts begin
 - In the heart of the believer
 - Daniel knew what was coming, and he understood his choices and the likely consequences of his choices
 - So he had a private decision to make, even before his situation was made known to anyone else
 - Daniel had to resolve to do the right thing
 - So Daniel considered all the possibilities, of what would happen if he ate and what would likely happen if he didn't
 - He knew eating would mean disobeying God and inviting God's displeasure
 - On the other hand, Daniel knew that refusing to eat meant crossing the most powerful man on earth and risking his life
 - With those two options on the table, the choice was obvious: Daniel chose to side with God, rather than the king
 - Daniel made up his mind to not defile himself, it says in v.8
 - The Hebrew word for "made up" or "set" means to fix or determine something and to hold to it surely
 - Daniel is determined to remain ceremonially obedient, no matter what comes
 - But that doesn't mean he isn't interested in trying to avoid the earthly consequences
 - He doesn't want to become a martyr, if he can avoid it
- So Daniel seeks permission of the commander of the officials to forgo eating the meat provided by the king
 - Isn't this remarkable? How many of us, when we imagine ourselves in such a situation, would consider the option Daniel selected here?
 - Wouldn't we just assume that by our defiance we must steel ourselves for inevitable punishment?
 - Do you ever stop to consider asking permission before making a protest?

- The Word of God commands us to give preference to God's commands over the precepts of men
- But the Word doesn't mandate we walk into persecution, unless it's unavoidable
- Daniel's discernment protected him, so that even as he resolved to defy the king's order, he was still searching for a way to please the king
 - This is the essence of Paul's command in Romans

[Rom. 12:17](#) ...Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

[Rom. 12:18](#) If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

- Daniel is searching for a way to obey God, while still respecting the king's authority
- And he thinks he has a way to do that, by approaching the commander of the court, the steward appointed to watch over them
- Daniel asks the commander if he and his friends might avoid defiling themselves with the king's food by eating only vegetables
 - Vegetables were generally safe for a Jew to eat and were not routinely sacrificed to idols
 - We might assume that a steward working for a pagan king would reject such a request out of hand
 - Why tolerate the demands of prisoners?
 - But notice in v.9, the Lord was already working behind the scenes to support Daniel in his obedience
 - The Lord granted Daniel compassion in the "sight" of the commander
 - In other words, God softened the heart of the commander so he would see the situation from Daniel's perspective
 - Already, we see the Lord at work through the agency of earthly authority to ensure that Daniel's stand for righteousness would succeed
 - This will be a recurring theme in Daniel's book

- And while we can't say for sure what the Lord will do in every situation, we can take comfort seeing what the Lord did for Daniel
 - This example reinforces our earlier observation: that when we take a stand for God's Word, we shouldn't assume persecution will always result
 - Persecution will come sometimes, certainly, and it does for Daniel eventually
 - But other times the Lord, by His grace, may choose to step in to keep us safe from the world's hatred and persecution
 - We simply do the right thing, trusting in Him for whatever the outcome
- The commander, moved by God to consider this request with sympathy, then wonders what will happen when the king sees the boys' declining health
 - Normally, a vegetarian diet must be carefully planned to ensure proper nutrition
 - This would have been true, especially in that day, when people depended on meat to bolster the diet and ensure strength
 - So the commander imagines the worse...that after a month or two of vegetables only, Daniel and his friends will appear gaunt and weak
 - His concerns are reasonable and probably accurate
 - A month or two of vegetables probably would weaken Daniel and his friends noticeably
 - Then, the king would turn to the commander and blame him for neglecting his duty to care for these young men
 - Truth be told, the king probably didn't care what Daniel ate
 - Nebuchadnezzar's only concern would have been that the commander take good care of these young men in his charge
 - So commander's dilemma is in how to keep the king happy, while satisfying Daniel's request
 - Daniel suggests a test to reassure the commander

- In v.10, Daniel tells the commander to let them eat vegetables and drink water for ten days, and then examine their appearance
- Ten days is short enough time that the king would be unlikely to notice any differences in their appearance
- But the commander could inspect their appearance closely, to know if they were being negatively affected
- If after ten days the boys appeared healthy, then the commander could be confident the king wouldn't notice either
- The choice of ten days is meaningful, since ten represents testimony in Scripture
 - The Lord inspired Daniel's choice of ten as a testimony of the Lord's intervention to sustain these boys
 - It suggests that the Lord planned to ensure their health, regardless of their diet
 - Daniel must have had an expectation that the Lord was prepared to sustain them, which is why he proposed the test
 - His faith was such that he had confidence in the Lord to perform this miracle in response to their obedience
- And what was the result?

Dan. 1:15 At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food.

Dan. 1:16 So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

Dan. 1:17 As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.

- Miraculously, these boys weren't simply holding their own, they were actually *better* looking than their peers who continued to eat a regular diet
 - His peers were other youths in captivity, probably including some from Judah, yet they didn't share Daniel's convictions
 - This reminds us that even as Daniel obeyed and followed the Lord, he represented a minority
 - The people of God are not uniformly obedient

- And based on the history of Scripture, it's safe to assume that a minority will seek to serve Him in faithfulness and without compromise
- It's that group we are all called to emulate
- As a result of this outcome, the commander saw no reason to suspend his support for Daniel
 - So the commander continued to give them vegetables only
 - The Hebrew word for "vegetables" in v.16 appears only here in the Bible
 - It literally means "seed grown", as from the ground
 - Daniel ate only of the ground
- Daniel goes on to say, in v.17, that the Lord's grace toward Daniel's physical strength was matched by the Lord's grace for his spiritual strength
 - Daniel also grew in his knowledge and intelligence while in training by God's grace
 - God was preparing this young man for great things, and it all began with Daniel taking a step of obedience in the face of opposition
 - While Daniel's training program may have originated in the mind of a pagan idol worshipper
 - Its true origin was in God's economy to school Daniel in ways suited to God's purpose for ministry in Babylon
- Daniel's situation parallels Paul and Moses, again
 - Paul was prepared in the great rabbinical traditions of Israel
 - Yet he lacked a heart to know God truly until God chose to harness Paul's intellect and training for the sake of the Gospel
 - Moses was trained in the courts of the Pharaoh, which prepared him to lead a people against the most powerful nation on earth
 - And now, Daniel is being prepared to serve the Living God, but that training came at the hands of a pagan court

- How is the Lord preparing you to serve Him through the everyday influences of a fallen, lost world so you may fulfill your mission for Christ?

Dan. 1:18 Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar.

Dan. 1:19 The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service.

Dan. 1:20 As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm.

Dan. 1:21 And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

- Finally, Daniel's introduction comes to an end, as Daniel graduates this Babylonian academy
 - He is presented before the king, and of all those who had been trained in this process, none was his equal
 - Once again, you can see that though God uses weak things, He is not beyond making weak things mighty when it suits His purpose
 - Daniel has become mighty: mighty in knowledge, mighty in discernment and wisdom, yet mighty in humility and obedience as well
 - These are not contrary qualities
 - In fact, they are essential compliments for anyone who desires to serve the Lord to the fullest of his or her capacity
 - Daniel's companions are also judged superior, perhaps as a result of their close companionship with Daniel, and as a group, they enter the king's service
 - As the king consults these young men for counsel, he finds them ten times better than any other Chaldean in his service
 - It seems unlikely that the king could quantify the superiority of Daniel's service so precisely, so we must conclude that the number ten is yet another reference to testimony
 - Daniel's excellence in service to this pagan king becomes a part of his testimony

- Just as Paul reminds us to do all we do in excellence, as for the Lord
- If we must be poor at something in life, let us be poor at sinning and nothing else
- Daniel is an example of what can come of our obedience to the Lord's Word, even in the face of persecution
 - Daniel's knowledge and wisdom were a testimony to how the Lord helps us rise to meet difficult challenges when we make excellence in His name our goal
 - Daniel's strength and fortitude remind us that faith lived-out calls for courage
 - And courage is the result of trusting in God's greater power over the power of our enemies
 - As Paul says in Romans 8, if God is for us, who can be against us?
 - At the same time, Daniel sits in captivity, taken from his home and forced into serving a foreign king
 - Which reminds us that God's choice may be for us to serve Him in difficult situations
 - Daniel didn't assume that because he was in Babylon that the God of Israel was no longer on the throne
 - He lived with a trust in God's power, even as he came to accept that the Lord's will was for Daniel and his friends to be in slavery
 - Remember that as you confront difficult circumstances in life
 - The fact they exist doesn't mean God isn't God
 - The test is whether we will still serve God in every situation, trusting He has good purposes for placing us where we are
- Consider how the chapter ends...looking to the end of Daniel's life and career in Babylon
 - Daniel served the king of Babylon until Babylon was conquered by Cyrus of Persia in 538 BC
 - His work as a minister in the court of the king lasted 65 years, making Daniel nearly 90 years old at the end of that time

- We have no record that Daniel ever returned to Judah with the exiles
- So despite Daniel's faithfulness and strong character, it was God's choice to leave Daniel in exile his whole life
 - This is the important footnote to Chapter 1
 - Daniel was a man who received the favor of God his whole life
 - Yet God kept Daniel subject to a foreign authority his whole life
- The lesson is that we can't measure God's faithfulness by our circumstances
 - God often places us in difficult circumstances, expressly so we can see His faithfulness at work
 - And He may leave us there for a time so we can demonstrate our faithfulness to Him in turn