

Mid Week • Daniel 1

INTRODUCTION

I have been looking forward to this study of the book of Daniel.

This book is an exciting combination of high drama and far-reaching prophecy.

We have dreams and visions of world rulers.

We have fiery furnaces and lion's dens.

We see strange and fierce beasts battling it out for world domination.

The Book of Daniel has been called the Revelation of the OT.

In fact, many bible scholars today consider Daniel to be the key that unlocks Jesus' Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 & 25 and the entire book of Revelation.

For those who are unfamiliar with the term "Olivet Discourse" this was when Jesus took the disciples up on to the Mount of Olives and told them about the entire scope of history and what signs would herald His return.

As anyone knows whose read Matthew 24 & 25 and the book of Revelation, there are things there hard to understand if those were the only references to them we had.

Daniel speaks of these same things and as we study these passages in the light of what we find in Daniel, it becomes much more clear.

That is why many refer to Daniel as the KEY TO PROPHETIC REVELATION.

In fact, that is what Dr. John Walvoord titles his commentary on Daniel.

THE PROBLEM

The prophecies we find in Daniel are so striking, and so accurate to what later transpired, that skeptics have denied Daniel *could* have been written when it claims to have been written.

They say it was made up *after* the things it foretells actually took place and was made to *look* like it was written earlier.

But this view didn't really find any ground until the rise of skepticism in the late 17th Century. [\[1\]](#)

Modern critics continue to deny the validity of Daniel.

While the book claims to have been written in the 6th century BC, they say it was composed 400 years later, after much of what it foretells took place.

The critics hold this position because in their world-view, it's impossible to foretell the future with the kind of incredible accuracy found in Daniel.

Very simply, they don't believe in prophecy!

You see, for these skeptics and critics, the problem with Daniel isn't interpretation.

They admit that when interpreted in a *normal sense*, what we find in Daniel is

fulfilled in amazing detail in history.
That's what trips the skeptic up – it's so clear, they say it can't be that clear.
So they say it has to be made up *after the fact*.

But for those who believe in God and that He reveals secrets to His people,
prophecy is no problem.
And the Book of Daniel becomes a wonderful chronicle of God's Sovereignty
over history.

Really, all of the objections of the critics have been amply refuted and what's
emerged is the realization that Daniel is exactly what it presents itself to be –
the record of a man uniquely gifted by God to lay out the whole scope of
human history from his day to the Return of Christ.

CHAPTER 1

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

Nebuchadnezzar led a total of three campaigns against Jerusalem – this was the first and occurred in 605 BC.

In this one, Nebuchadnezzar simply wanted to conquer Jerusalem and put them under tribute.

It was his intent to eventually swing down and conquer the age-old empire and enemy Egypt and Judah offered itself as an important stepping stone to the conquest of Egypt.

By taking Jerusalem and installing his own puppet government there, he could turn this region into a buffer zone against incursions by the Pharaoh's armies.

As I said, this was Nebuchadnezzar's first campaign against Judah and took place in 605 BC.

The second campaign came in 597 BC when Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin rebelled against the Babylonian officials and troops which had been stationed there to enforce the Babylonians hegemony.

In this conquest, the king, his family, and 10,000 of the leading citizens as well as all their wealth was taken as booty.

It was in this group that Ezekiel was taken captive.

The third and final campaign came in 586 BC when Zedekiah, the new king whom Nebuchadnezzar had installed, decided to rebel.

After a long siege, the city of Jerusalem fell and the Babylonians, deciding they had had enough of rebel Judah's troubles decided to level the capital and destroy the Jewish temple.

In this first campaign in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar left the sitting king of Judah,

Jehoiakim, on his throne.

But as it says in v. 2, he took some of the articles of the temple with him back to Shinar, which is the ancient name for the region of Babylon.

Why did Nebuchadnezzar take these things from the temple in Jerusalem and put them in the temple of his god back home?

Because they were trophies!

In the ancient world, when one city or region or nation conquered another, it was far more than just a demonstration of one army's superiority over another. The combatants saw it as a demonstration of one god's superiority over another.

There was more at stake in ancient warfare than just geography – religious faith was at stake.

In the ancient mind, if my kingdom conquers yours it's because my god is stronger and better than yours.

And so, when I conquer you, I'm going to sack the temple of your god and take from there the furniture and instruments you used to worship your god.

Then I'm going to take them back to my land, put them in the temple of my god so my god can gloat over yours!

We see this when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant – they put it in the temple of their god Dagon.

It was a trophy of war and the idea was that Dagon could see it there in front of him and relish in his victory.

Of course we know what happened to Dagon – he fell down as though worshipping before the ark.

When Nebuchadnezzar placed the articles from the temple in Jerusalem in the temple to his god – Bel, it was as trophies of Bel's superiority over Yahweh.

And this gives us an important clue as to the theme of the book of Daniel.

Daniel's ministry covered some 70 years.

He was one of the noble's families deported in Nebuchadnezzar's first conquest of Jerusalem in 605 BC

He served in the royal court of Babylon all the way through the Persian conquest of Babylon and into the 3rd year of the Persian king Cyrus in 536.

After his retirement from public service he lived for another 6 or 7 years and this book was compiled in the last decade of his life.

Daniel knew that with the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of the temple, the Jewish people might be driven to conclude that the nation of Israel was now over, a thing of the past, never to be reformed.

To the ancient way of thinking, Israel's God, Yahweh, had been defeated by the superior gods of the Babylonians.

Look, their temple treasures were trophies in Bel's temple and treasure house!

The book of Daniel, with its sweeping visions of the future reveal that while Israel failed God, God had not failed Israel and one day He would move to restore the nation and bring her in to a day of blessing and glory she had never seen or

dreamed of before.

The theme of the Book of Daniel is God's Sovereignty over History!

No matter how dark things may seem, God is at work to accomplish His plan for the ages.

Living by faith in Him means holding on to hope and never letting go.

That lesson is reinforced in the story of the fiery furnace and the lion's den and is graphically spread out in the dreams and visions that are recounted in these chapters.

³Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴young men in whom *there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.*

Nebuchadnezzar was not only a brilliant military leader and strategist, as proven by his dominance of the Middle East at this time, but he was a genius at the administration of his empire as well.

We see that here.

He ordered Ashpenaz, who was the official in charge of his personal servants and court staff, to select some good-looking and physically fit teenage boys to be candidates for inclusion in his royal court.

This served two purposes:

- 1) By taking these noble children, it served as a sort of hostage-situation so that their parents would be less likely to rebel - & -
- 2) By educating them in the ways of Babylon and bringing them up in the luxury and finery of the Babylonian court, it would mold these young men, who were the most likely to be the leadership of the next generation of Jews, to be inclined toward Babylon, rather than hostile toward it.

Warn the parents, woo the sons!

Notice well what these young boys were to learn - the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

While the word "Chaldeans" is just another word for Babylonians the way it is used most often in Daniel refers to the wise men of Babylon.

These were guys who were in to astrology and the occult.

They held the mysteries of hidden knowledge and functioned as the priests of the religions of Babylon.

They also were the King's counselors, who advised him in all sorts of matters from economic policy to military strategy.

These Jewish young boys were to be educated in the best learning of these Chaldeans.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted them inculcated with the wisdom and culture of Babylon.

There was an attempt to influence them and seduce their minds and hearts away from their Jewish roots into the ways of pagan Babylon.

How? Through *education* in the *literature* and *language* of the Chaldeans.
How would these young men respond?

⁵And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king.

Part of the re-education regimen was the diet and daily life of the Babylonian court.

Their education didn't just influence their minds – it was a total immersion in the culture of Babylon.

⁶Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

Singled out of all the Jewish young men taken to Babylon were 4 who the story now centers on.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

One of the first things they are given is new names – Babylonians names.

As we've seen so often before, the conferring of a new name means the beginning of a new life.

And the one who gives another a new name is demonstrating their dominance of that person they rename.

So when Ashpenaz gives the names Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego to these young men it was Nebuchadnezzar's way of saying, "I have authority over you and from this day on, you have new lives – lives governed by the culture of Babylon."

Their names reflect this in that each of them refer to one of the Babylonian gods.

⁸But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. ¹⁰And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

Not long after arriving in Babylon, as the Jewish captives began their training, the food that was part of the program was set before Daniel and his friends.

Daniel took one look at it and said, "I can't eat this."

Why? It wasn't kosher – it didn't qualify as edible under the strictures of the Mosaic Law.

No doubt Daniel had had plenty of time to think about the conquest of Jerusalem and why God had allowed it.

More than likely, he had heard the preaching of Jeremiah the Prophet who had said the reason Jerusalem would fall was because of her rebellion against God and her repeated violation of God's law.

Daniel then *purposed in his heart* that although he was in exile, he would do

his best to follow God and live by the light he had.
As he looked at this Babylonian fare, he knew it was not the diet permitted by God for his people.
It was comprised of meats and foods God had prohibited.
But even more, Daniel knew that the meat and wine had been offered to one of the Babylonian gods and to eat it would be to demonstrate fellowship with those gods.
This was something he could not do.
If he had, as it says here, he would have defiled himself
So he asked Ashpenaz if he could have an *alternative* diet.
Ashpenaz's response was one of concern.
He feared that Daniel and his friends, if given a different diet, would end up looking ill.
After all, what diet could be better than the one the king himself ate?
Ashpenaz could just picture these 4 young men standing with all the rest when it came time for them to be tested, and their countenance would be sickly and pale.
He knew his neck would be on the line as the one who was responsible for the safe-keeping of these charges.
So he expresses his concern to Daniel who's been the front man for the 4 of them in their request to be dismissed from the king's approved diet.
Before we go on, I want to ask you to note the extreme wisdom and skill Daniel uses to deal with this tricky situation.
Daniel doesn't cop a superior attitude and defiantly push away the king's food and wine.
He doesn't throw it on the floor and yell his outrage that such paganism is thrust on him.
He doesn't rant or scream or become all indignant.
He humbly and carefully requests of Ashpenaz, the one who is in authority over him, to be given an exemption from these foods.
Even though he had gained favor with Ashpenaz and was in something of a privileged position with him, he didn't take advantage of it and force the chief of the eunuchs into a predicament.
Daniel strove to show his submission to Ashpenaz while balancing it with his submission to God who demanded he NOT eat this food.
The result was a *humble refusal* to sin.
We have much to learn from Daniel in this.
I think his three friends followed his example well when years later they were faced with bowing down to the golden image Nebuchadnezzar erected and demanded that all worship.
They refused to bow because it would have been a violation of the command to worship no one but God.
For this they were arrested and brought before the fiery furnace.
Nebuchadnezzar gave them one last chance to bow, but they humbly refused.
Their attitude before the king wasn't one of defiance but humility and submission.
"Oh King, live forever," they said. "We cannot bow, so put us in the fire if

you must.”

Thousands upon thousands of Christians went to their death in the first centuries of the church, not defiantly shaking their fist at their tormentors, but holding forth a hand of humble submission and forgiveness.

I fear that Christianity today has taken on a tone of *ugliness* when it comes to dealing with the opposition of the world.

We protest and angrily shout our slogans.

Where is the humility?

Where is the sensitivity to the call that we be submitted to those who are in authority over us, and when they are wrong and demand that we do that which would be rebellion to God, we obey God and humbly submit to them and their handling of us.

May I give an example – the day may come when I would be prohibited from speak out against certain sins and certain political or religious positions.

That may be the law of man – but I am constrained by the love and law of God to declare His counsel.

If doing so means I run afoul of the law of man and I am arrested, I will not angrily cry out or encourage rebellion.

I will submit and yield myself into the authorities’ hands.

And wherever I go and do I will strive to remain faithful to what the Lord commands.

Maybe the Lord has a jail ministry for me.

He had one for Joseph and Paul.

The point is this, because we live in a fallen world that opposes God and not all the authorities that exist are in tune with God’s will, there will be times when our faith calls us to behavior contrary to the will of man.

Like Daniel, we must be wise: Obey God in our *actions*, but remain submitted to man in our *demeanor*.

¹¹So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²“Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.” ¹⁴So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

Daniel wisely suggests a test.

Ashpenaz had been concerned about the health of the 4, so Daniel proposes a trial.

For 10 days, they will eat nothing but vegetables and water.

At the end of that time, let the 4 of them be compared to the young guys who were eating the approved diet.

Daniel approaches the servant *under* Ashpenaz who had been assigned the duty of overseeing their meals.

In 10 days they would not be brought before the king so there was no fear here that if the trial didn’t work out Ashpenaz would suffer any harm.

The steward agreed and for 10 days all the 4 of them ate were vegetables and

water.

15And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. 16Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

God showed his favor on Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah by sustaining their strength and improving their health over this test period.

And as a result, the steward agreed to let them continue on with their diet.

Now, the point of this passage is not to promote a vegetarian diet!

That is not at all the point of this passage.

The issue was *compromise* - and what God does by *improving* the health of these 4 young Jewish men is show His approval of their refusal to yield to the paganism surrounding them.

Their peers who stayed with the king's table no doubt considered them *fanatical*.

After all, it was a lot easier to rationalize and say that God had abandoned the Jews so why continue to obey Him?

They could rationalize their compromise by saying that it was the only fare available and after all, one has to eat.

There was an endless number of rationalizations to compromise, if they wanted to find one.

But Daniel was a man who wasn't looking for a way out of obedience – he was looking for a way to *stay* obedient even when it was inordinately difficult.

Daniel and the his three friends become marked by this no-compromise attitude.

While compromise may be a *virtue* when it comes to *politics* and *relationships*, it must never be permitted in the area of morality and the pursuit of holiness.

17As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Because these 4 young men made the pursuit of holiness a priority, God found in them men He could entrust the riches of His wisdom and knowledge to.

To Daniel, as their leader, he gave the special skill of being able to decipher the secret meaning of dreams and visions.

This was a skill highly valued among the Chaldeans and so it destined Daniel for prominence in the Babylonian court.

So valued does Daniel's wisdom become that he becomes a perpetual fixture in the court of Babylon.

It was the practice of ancient kings to bring in their own counselors and staff when they ascended the throne – like our President brings in a whole new cabinet when he takes office.

Out with the old and in with the new.

But Daniel lasted through several kings; even when the Persians deposed the Babylonians and set up a whole new system, Daniel remained.

His wisdom and godliness, his no-compromise stand in life was so well known and respected that it commended him to rulers.

18Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. **19**Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. **20**And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who were in all his realm. **21**Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

This inspection was at the end of the three years of indoctrination in the literature and language of the Chaldeans and their immersion in the culture of the Babylonians.

Finally they are brought in and Nebuchadnezzar interviewed them.

When all was said and done, there were only 4 who seemed to be promising fixtures for the court, Daniel and his friends.

If we say that they were between 13 & 16 years old when they were deported from Jerusalem and this is three years later, that makes them no more than 16 to 19 years old.

That's a pretty young age to stand before the ruler of the entire ancient middle east and hopefully give some kind of intelligent answers.

Have you ever had to carry on a conversation with someone well known, important, or powerful?

It can be intimidating.

There's this pressure to appear smart and sophisticated.

You want to make a good impression, so you try to be witty and sound erudite and eloquent.

But the pressure is so great and the fear factor adds to the tension and so you end up saying stupid things and making a fool of yourself.

As we've had some well known musicians and bible teachers here at Calvary, I've had the opportunity to have dinner with some of them and get to know them beyond the public image that attends them as a public figure.

I've felt the pressure to appear intelligent and eloquent.

I've wanted to make a good impression – I know, it's pride – I admit it.

So often, as soon as I've said something I've kicked myself and thought what a idiot I am.

Imagine, if you can, the incredible pressure that was on these young Jewish men as they came before Nebuchadnezzar's throne!

There he was clothed in his regal robes, surrounded by the epitome of the world's wealth and power at that time.

If there was every a scene to awe and intimidate, this was it.

And then the king began to ask questions – question they knew were aimed at gauging their eloquence and wisdom.

If you've ever experienced text anxiety, you might have a faint glimpse of what these poor guys were going through.

But I have to believe that when Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah came before Nebuchadnezzar it was remarkably different.
Oh sure, there was a bit of apprehension on their part – but nothing like it had been for the others.
And that's why they performed so much better and presented themselves as wiser and more learned than the others.
You see, because the others had *compromised* and accepted the indoctrination of the Babylonian culture, they had become seduced by the world of the Babylonians.
And at the top of that world was the king.
Because they had capitulated, surrendered, given in to the pressure to conform to the world, they came to define their lives and their values by the world.
And their chief fear became focused in most powerful man in that system.

But Daniel didn't compromise.
He decided to remain as loyal to the Lord as possible.
He maintained his distance from the world while learning it's language and ways.
He didn't just blindly conform, accepting the indoctrination as it came.
He analyzed and absorbed so that he could use it in the service of God.
It was God and God alone that Daniel feared, and because of that, when it came time for him to stand before the king of Babylon, he had things in the right perspective.
Daniel wasn't trying to impress Nebuchadnezzar; he was trying to glorify God.

Friends I don't think we can ever go wrong if our bottom line is the glory of God.
If the fear of God burns in our hearts, then we will never fear man, no matter how lofty or powerful they may be.
If we fear God and make His glory our aim, then we won't compromise with the world.
We won't let ourselves get pushed into it's mold.
We won't let our minds become indoctrinated with this world's wisdom and values.

You young people who are going to school – whether public or private, listen to me.
We have here the story of 4 teenage boys who determined to live for God in an uncompromising way in the midst of a setting that was totally hostile to their faith in God.
The very best the world had to offer was handed out to them on a golden platter, free of charge.
They refused it because they knew it meant forsaking the path of truth and eternal reward.
They refused it though most of their peers went the other way.
The path was clearly laid out before them:
1) Immerse yourself in Babylon and enjoy it's pleasures now while forfeiting

the future.
2) Immerse yourself in God and enjoy His blessings eternally.

But look what happened to those who chose compromise and surrender to the world – the world’s offer proved to be a lie – and the rug got pulled out from under them when Nebuchadnezzar rejected them.

It matters not if you got to public or private school – you are pressured to conform. Most of the private schools I know of have only a marginally better spiritual environment than public schools.

And the reason why is because most of the students, while claiming to be Christians, have compromised with the world and would rather define their lives by the world’s standards than the Lord’s.

From their fashions to their values and priorities, there are virtually indistinguishable from their worldly peers.

I’m sure there are Christian schools that are an exception to this, but it’s what I’ve witnessed.

Be a Daniel!

Don’t compromise!

God is looking for some Daniels and Hananiahs; some Mishaels and Azariahs. He’s looking for some young men and women who will set themselves apart to make His glory their bottom line – who are uncompromising in their pursuit of holiness.

On these He will pour out special wisdom and understanding.

He will bring them before rulers and give them a place of counsel to the nations.

Because men and women like that aren’t corrupted by power.

They can’t be bought and sold and aren’t dazzled by the trappings of office.

CONCLUSION

As we wrap it up tonight, I want to ask you to look with me again at v. 8

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.

The pressures to compromise were abundant.

Think about them; they’re the same ones we endure.

1) Go Along to Get Along – It’s what was offered by the approved system. The goal of these young guys was to advance up the ranks of the corporate chain.

To get along with the system and not create waves.

The official fare, the way to do it was to eat at the king’s table.

2) Disappointment With God – Where was God? Why had he let them be taken into captivity, separated from their homes and families?

If God’s not going to treat me better, then I’m going to do my own thing.

3) Everyone else is doing it – Besides Daniel and his friends, everyone just went along with the offered fare.

4) Desire – The king’s food were a lot more appealing to the flesh.

But notice what v. 8 says, Daniel purposed in his heart *not to defile himself*.

He saw capitulation and compromise as harmful to himself!

To eat would have dirtied himself and made him unfit.

This wasn’t an option for him so he *purposed in his heart* to not compromise.

If we could only see sin for what it is – defiling, harmful, how it wrecks and breaks us.

Then we would purpose in our hearts not to sin.

This was the key for Daniel – he made up his mind, he purposed in his heart not to compromise with sin.

Let me close with that – Have you purposed in your heart not to defile yourself?

Or does your heart waver back and forth like a wind driven cork in the sea?

Have you pledged yourself to holiness, or are you trying to walk some line of compromise between the world and God?

In Acts 11:23, we read that Barnabas went around the churches and encouraged the believers to purpose in their hearts to follow the Lord.

In other words – he called them to stop playing round the edges of the

Christian life and to launch out into a commitment of whole-hearted devotion to God.

Is your life more marked by *purpose* or *compromise*?

[1] Porphyry was a 3rd Century AD skeptic who denied Daniel’s legitimacy, but based n the same faulty assumptions. He remained alone in his criticism of Daniel until the 17th Century and the rise of higher criticism.