Daniel 1

Purposed in His Heart: Faithful in Babylon

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Babylon can take a young man's home, his name and his schooling, but not his heart. Daniel decides ahead of time where his line is, holds it with courtesy, and leaves the results to God — and God gives, from start to finish.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

00 The Text

DANIEL 1 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions	Green Command / instruction	Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning	★ Violet Promise / blessing	Amber Time / place / contrast

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

2 And ▲ the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to ⚠ the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;

4 Children in whom was no blemish , but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach ⚠ the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of ⇄ the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs ⚠ gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not ⚠ defile himself with the portion of ⇄ the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not ⚠ defile himself.

9 Now ▲ God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ⇄ ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of ⇄ the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ⇄ ten days.

15 And at the end of ⇄ ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of ⇄ the king's meat.

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, ▲ God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all ★ visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ★ ten times better than all the ⚠ magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

21 And Daniel continued even unto ◷ the first year of king Cyrus.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ◷ In the third year
- **v1** ◷ Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon
- **v2** ▲ the Lord gave
- **v2** ◷ Shinar
- **v2** ⚠ the house of his god
- **v4** ⚠ the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans
- **v5** ⇄ the king's meat (*every occurrence*)
- **v5** ◷ three years
- **v7** ⚠ gave names
- **v8** ▮▮ purposed in his heart
- **v8** ⚠ defile himself (*every occurrence*)
- **v9** ▲ God had brought Daniel into favour
- **v12** ▮▮ Prove thy servants
- **v12** ⇄ ten days (*every occurrence*)
- **v17** ▲ God gave them knowledge
- **v17** ★ visions and dreams
- **v20** ★ ten times better
- **v20** ⚠ magicians and astrologers
- **v21** ◷ the first year of king Cyrus

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. KJV "meat" means food in general; "pulse" (vv12, 16) is the NASB95's "vegetables"; "Melzar" (vv11, 16) is the NASB95's "overseer."

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · DANIEL 1:8 (KJV)

8 But Daniel ▮▮ purposed in his heart that he would not ⚠ defile himself with the portion of ⇄ the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not ⚠ defile himself.

Setting

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it" (v1). It is 605 BC. The first wave of captives — teenagers from the royal family and the nobles — is marched hundreds of miles to Babylon. The chapter covers Daniel's whole

career in one sweep: from that first year to "the first year of Cyrus the king" (v21), about seventy years later.

Structure

- vv1–2 — **the fall:** "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God" (v2). Nebuchadnezzar takes them to the land of Shinar and puts them in the treasury of his god.
- vv3–7 — **the program:** the king orders Ashpenaz, chief of his officials, to choose youths "in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom" (v4). They are to learn "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (v4), eat "a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank" (v5), train three years, and enter the king's service (v5). They get new names: Daniel → Belteshazzar, Hananiah → Shadrach, Mishael → Meshach, Azariah → Abed-nego (vv6–7).
- vv8–16 — **the line Daniel draws:** "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" (v8). He asks permission, and "God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials" (v9). The commander is afraid: "you would make me forfeit my head to the king" (v10). Daniel goes to the overseer with a proposal: "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink" (v12). After ten days "their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food" (v15). The overseer keeps them on vegetables (v16).
- vv17–21 — **God's result:** "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" (v17). At the end of the three years the king interviews them: "not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah" (v19). He finds them "ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm" (v20). "And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king" (v21).

Repeated words

the king (throughout); choice food (vv5, 8, 13, 15, 16); defile (v8 twice); ten (vv12, 14, 15, 20); gave / granted — God gave (vv2, 9, 17); the commander assigned names (v7); youths (vv4, 10, 13, 15, 17); wisdom and understanding (vv4, 17, 20); appearance / faces (vv10, 13, 15).

Contrasts

Nebuchadnezzar seems to win (v1) ⟷ "the Lord gave" Judah into his hand (v2). The vessels of God's house sit in "the treasury of his god" (v2) ⟷ the living vessels — four young men — stay God's own (v8). Babylon renames them (v7) ⟷ Daniel decides who he is (v8). The commander fears the king (v10) ⟷ Daniel fears God. Babylon's three years of training (v5) ⟷ what "God gave them" (v17). Nebuchadnezzar's empire falls (v21) ⟷ Daniel is still standing.

Chapter theme (my words)

Babylon can take a young man's home, his name and his schooling, but not his heart. Daniel decides ahead of time where his line is, holds it with courtesy, and leaves the results to God — and God gives, from start to finish.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · DANIEL 1:1–2 (KJV)

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

Who is really in charge? (vv1–2)

The headline says Nebuchadnezzar came. But v2 says "the Lord gave" — the key to the whole book. Judah went into exile because of generations of idolatry and broken sabbath years (Lev 26:33–35; 2 Chr 36:20–21; Jer 25:11). Isaiah had warned Hezekiah that his descendants would serve in the palace of the king of Babylon (Isa 39:6–7). Babylon's king thought he was taking the God of Israel captive by putting His vessels in his own temple. The rest of Daniel shows otherwise (5:2–4, 23–30).

The dating question

Daniel says "the third year" of Jehoiakim; Jeremiah calls 605 BC "the fourth year" (Jer 25:1; 46:2). Guzik: Daniel uses the Babylonian method, where a king's first partial year is his accession year and doesn't count; Jeremiah counts it. Walvoord, in Guzik: "Having spent most of his life in Babylon, it is only natural that Daniel should use a Babylonian form of chronology." Guzik also cites the Babylonian Chronicles and Berossus (via Josephus) on Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Carchemish that same year.

The re-education program (vv3–7)

Guzik sees four tools Babylon used — and the world still uses — to reshape a person:

- **Separation** — far from home, family and temple.
- **Education** — "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (v4): a new worldview.
- **Diet** — the king's table, daily, making them dependent on his provision.
- **Identity** — new names that replace the God of Israel with Babylon's gods.

The names tell the story:

- **Daniel** ("God is my judge") → **Belteshazzar** ("Bel protect his life" / Bel's prince).
- **Hananiah** ("Yahweh has been gracious") → **Shadrach** (likely linked to the moon-god Aku).
- **Mishael** ("Who is what God is?") → **Meshach** (perhaps "Who is what Aku is?").
- **Azariah** ("Yahweh has helped") → **Abed-nego** ("servant of Nebo/Nego").

They were probably teenagers. Isaiah 39:7 speaks of them as "officials" (*saris*), a word that can mean a royal official rather than strictly a eunuch.

Why draw the line at food? (v8)

Daniel didn't refuse the education or the new name; he couldn't control those. He drew the line where obedience to God was at stake. Guzik gives three likely reasons: the food wasn't kosher (Lev 11), it had probably been offered to Babylon's gods first, and eating at the king's table signaled covenant loyalty. Baldwin, in Guzik: "By eastern standards to share a meal was to commit one's self to friendship; it was of covenant significance." The verb "made up his mind" is literally "set it upon his heart" — the decision came before the pressure did.

How Daniel held the line (vv8–16)

He *asked*; he didn't demand (v8). When the commander was afraid, Daniel didn't argue. He went to the man under him with a creative, limited test — ten days, measurable, low-risk for the overseer (vv11–13). That's wisdom that is "peaceable, gentle, reasonable" (James 3:17). Spurgeon, in Guzik: "Be ready for a bad name; be willing to be called a bigot." But Daniel also was not needlessly offensive. And notice v9 — before Daniel ever asked, "God granted Daniel favor." God had gone ahead of him (Prov 16:7).

Better and fatter (vv15–16)

Ten days of vegetables and water don't normally beat a royal diet. The point is not a diet plan but God's hand (Exod 23:25). Guzik notes that the result came from God, not from nutrition.

God gave (vv17–21)

Three times in this chapter God gave (Hebrew *nathan*): He gave Judah to Babylon (v2), favor to Daniel (v9) and wisdom to the four (v17). Babylon's three-year program didn't make them wise; God did. Daniel's understanding of visions and dreams sets up chapter 2. "Ten times better" — the king's own verdict. Guzik: they were "in Babylon, but not of Babylon" (John 17:15–16). "Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus" (v21) — he outlasted Nebuchadnezzar, the entire Babylonian empire and its fall in 539 BC, and saw the decree that let the Jews go home (Ezra 1:1–4). Faithfulness outlives empires.

Word study (Hebrew)

- **gave — *nathan* (H5414):** to give, hand over — the key verb of the chapter (vv2, 9, 17).
- **vessels — *kelî* (H3627):** articles, utensils, implements of the temple.
- **Shinar — *Shinʿar* (H8152):** the plain of Babylon, where Babel was built (Gen 11:2).
- **no defect — *mum* (H3971):** blemish — the word used of acceptable sacrifices (Lev 22:20).
- **Chaldeans — *Kasdîm* (H3778):** Babylon's people; also its class of wise men and astrologers.
- **choice food — *pathbag* (H6598):** a Persian loanword: the king's delicacies, portion from his table.
- **made up his mind — *sîm* (H7760) + *lēb* (H3820):** "set upon his heart" — a settled decision.
- **defile — *gaʾal* (H1351):** to pollute, stain (Isa 59:3; Mal 1:7).
- **favor — *chesed* (H2617):** loyal kindness, covenant love.
- **compassion — *rachamîm* (H7356):** tender mercy, from the word for womb.
- **test — *nasah* (H5254):** to try, prove.
- **vegetables — *zeroʿîm* (H2235):** things sown — seeds, grains, vegetables.
- **understanding — *bîn* (H995):** to discern, perceive.

- **magicians — *chartom* (H2748):** engraver, scribe-priest, occult expert.
- **conjurers — *ʾashshaph* (H825):** enchanter, one who uses spells.

Cross-references

Gen 11:1–9; Gen 39:1–6, 21–23; Lev 11; Lev 26:33–35; Deut 28:36; 2 Kgs 20:16–18; 2 Kgs 24:1; 2 Chr 36:5–7, 20–21; Ps 119:11; Prov 16:7; Isa 39:5–7; Jer 25:1, 11–12; Jer 29:4–7; Ezek 14:14, 20; Dan 6:3–5, 10; Ezra 1:1–4; Matt 24:15; John 17:15–16; Rom 12:1–2; 1 Cor 10:13; James 3:17; 1 Pet 2:11–12.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · DANIEL 1:17 (KJV)

17 As for these four children, ▲ God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all ★ visions and dreams.

Command to obey — "made up his mind."

Daniel decided before the plate was in front of him. I'll settle my lines *now*, not in the moment of temptation: where my eyes go, what I drink, what I click, who I'm alone with. For the men I disciple, this is the heart of recovery — you don't decide at the bar or at 2 a.m.; you decide in the morning, before God, and you tell someone.

Sin to confess — letting Babylon feed me

The world doesn't usually demand that I deny Christ. It just offers me its table every day — its entertainment, its values, its idea of success — until I'm dependent on it. Where have I been eating "the king's choice food" without noticing? I'll name it and ask for a different diet: the Word first (Ps 119:11).

Warning to heed — new names

Babylon renamed them to make them forget whose they were. The world, my past and the enemy all try to rename me: addict, failure, nobody, too far gone. My name is what God says: forgiven, son, His (2 Cor 5:17). For men coming out of prison or addiction, that may be the first truth they need to hear.

Promise to trust — God goes ahead

"God granted Daniel favor" (v9) — before Daniel asked. When I take a stand for Him, I don't take it alone. He can move the heart of the boss, the officer, the judge or the family member (Prov 21:1). Results are His job; faithfulness is mine.

Example to follow — courage with courtesy

Daniel was firm, but he was respectful, creative and reasonable. He asked rather than demanded, proposed a test, and gave the other man a way to say yes. I want to stand firm without being harsh — "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15).

Worship

God gave. He gave Judah into Babylon's hand, gave Daniel favor, gave the four wisdom, and kept Daniel standing seventy years until Cyrus let His people go home. Empires rise and fall; my God is still giving.

Prayer

Lord, You are the God who gives. Help me make up my mind before the pressure comes. Keep me from being fed by Babylon and renamed by the world. Give me Daniel's courage and his courtesy, and let me be faithful in a foreign land until You bring me home. Amen.

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