

## Sunday Morning Message

September 17, 2023

Title – “Standing Apart from the Rest - Living for a Purpose”

Text – Daniel 1

Congregational Reading – Daniel 1:3 - 8

### Introduction (vs. 1 – 2)

In this first chapter to the Book of Daniel we are introduced to Daniel and his three Hebrew companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. We learn that these four young men were part of the first deportation from the Land of Judah into Babylon, which took place around 605 B.C. This chapter will reveal some amazing things about all four of these boys, particularly Daniel:

They were men who were smart and that had great natural abilities. (v. 1)

They were men who possessed great faith and character. (v. 8)

They were men who were helped and blessed tremendously by God. (vs. 9, 17)

### The First Invasion of Jerusalem (vs. 1 – 2)



These first couple of verses reveal the historical context regarding the first deportation of people from Jerusalem into Babylon.

The Book of Daniel gives us the historical perspective from Babylon. However, the Bible provides much additional information regarding some of the people and events that are relevant to Daniel.

v. 1 – Jehoiakim - see 2 Kings 23:25 – 25:17 (also 2 Chronicles 36) for context regarding the Kings of Judah from Josiah through Zedekiah. The account in 2 Chronicles is more concise than 2 Kings, but it contains some vital information as to why God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed. (2 Chronicles 36:12 – 17; 21) All of these kings, save Josiah were evil.

### **The Last Five Kings of Judah**

1. Josiah - Reigned 31 years (640 - 609 BC)

2. Jehoahaz (Shallum) - Reigned 3 months (609 BC)

    Taken prisoner to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco

3. Jehoiakim (Eliakim) - Reigned 11 years (609 - 598 BC)

    Died in Jerusalem

4. Jehoichin (Jeconiah, Coniah) - Reigned 3 months (December 9, 598 - March 16, 597 BC)

    Taken prisoner to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (with Ezekiel)

5. Zedekiah - Reigned 11 years (597 - 586 BC)

    Taken prisoner to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar

Jehoiakim is also mentioned 25 times in Jeremiah's prophecy. Jeremiah was the prophet in Jerusalem while Daniel was in Babylon. Jehoiakim was a wicked king. He was very covetous (Jeremiah 22:11 – 19). One of the more notable acts that he committed was cutting pages out of a book written by Jeremiah under the inspiration of God. He then took the pages and burnt them in his fireplace. (Jeremiah 36)

v. 2 - "Shinar" – ancient name meaning "the country of two rivers", most likely referring to the Tigris and Euphrates. This area has also been called Babylonia and Chaldea. We first see this name used in Genesis:

*"And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar."* (Genesis 10:8-10)

The vessels that Nebuchadnezzar brought back to Babylon would later be brought out by Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar in Daniel 5.

Notice in verse two, the reference to the "house of his God" and "the treasure house of his God." Babylon had a polytheistic worship system, but their chief god was Bel who was also referred to as Merodach.

*"Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast."* (Isaiah 46:1)

*"Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces."* (Jeremiah 50:2)

*"And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall."* (Jeremiah 51:44)

#### **I. Daniel's Deportation from Jerusalem (vs. 3 – 7)**

In these verses, we learn that King Nebuchadnezzar, in addition to taking some souvenirs from Jerusalem, also decided to bring back some people. In this first deportation, the king deported royal children from Judaea; specifically, "*Children in whom*":

1. *was no blemish*, - meaning without physical defects or moral stain
2. *but well favoured*, - meaning good looking
3. *and skilful in all wisdom*, - meaning to be wise
4. *and cunning in knowledge*, - meaning acquainted with general knowledge

Note – wisdom and knowledge are what Solomon asked the Lord for. (See 2 Chronicles 1:6 – 12)

5. *and understanding science*, - meaning well educated

6. *and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, - meaning they carried themselves well and they could do what was expected from them.*
7. *and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."* – they also had to be teachable.

Basically, the king wanted the best of the best from the land of Judah. He wanted to train them to serve him in the Kingdom of Babylon.

Notice also that the king entrusted this responsibility to Ashpenaz who was “the master of the eunuchs”. The word eunuch could imply that this man was simply an officer or chamberlain for the king. The Hebrew word, “cariyc”, is used that way elsewhere in the Old Testament. Potiphar was an “officer” (eunuch) for Pharaoh. (Genesis 37:36) However, the word also carries the meaning of castration, and often eunuchs were castrated men that were given the charge of protecting the king’s wives and daughters. Jesus discussed eunuchs in the New Testament:

*"His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."* (Matthew 19:10-12)

The eunuch in Acts 8 was entrusted with protecting the treasure of the Queen of Ethiopia, but there is no indication from the context that he was castrated. However, every New Testament definition of the word implies someone who is emasculated.

These Hebrew men, including Daniel, were made eunuchs for the King of Babylon. Though there is no record that these men were castrated, there is also no indication in the Scripture that any of these men ever married or had children. They were to be completely devoted to the service of the king. (See also 1 Corinthians 7:1 – 9; 32 - 33)

Notice in verse five that King Nebuchadnezzar appointed them a special diet of the best meat and wine. Presumably, this diet would ensure that these men would be healthy and very strong. However, the meat was most likely sacrificed in honor of one of their gods, which would be an abomination for the Hebrews to eat.

Notice also that the deportees from Judaea would endure this process for three years. The goal was to transform these promising young men into Babylonians. They were trained to eat, think, and live as princes of Babylon. The word, “nourished” (*gadal*), in verse five implies more than mere physical sustenance. It conveys the ideal of both physical and mental development. These Hebrew boys were to be trained physically and taught how to be Babylonians. This was a boot camp of sorts. They would also be indoctrinated spiritually.

In verses 6 – 7, we are introduced to four specific young men from the land of Judah who were taken from their homeland in the first deportation:

1. Daniel (*God is my Judge*) whose name was changed by Nebuchadnezzar to Belteshazzar (*Bel protect his life*).
2. Hananiah (*God has favoured*) whose name was changed to Shadrach (*command of Aku [the moon god]*).
3. Mishael (*who is what God is*) whose name was changed to Meshach (*who is as Aku is*).
4. Azariah (*Jehovah has helped*) whose name was changed to Abednego (*servant of Nebo*).

Jehovah God was removed from all their names and was replaced with the name of one of the Babylonian idols. Interestingly, Daniel is the only one of the four who remains known by his Hebrew name. The other three are remembered historically by their Chaldean names.

## II. Daniel’s Determination in Babylon – To Glorify the Lord (vs. 8 – 16)

Daniel determined (he “purposed”) to live for the Lord. He was determined that Babylon was not going to conform him, but rather that he was going to be a testimony of someone who was transformed by God.

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."* (Romans 12:1-2)

- A. Daniel’s determination began in his heart (v. 8)

Though I cannot be sure, I believe that Daniel was raised in a godly home or had some type of spiritual influence in his life that developed him into a young man with character and Biblical convictions.

As we learn the Scriptures and grow in the Lord, it is important for us to also make some determinations regarding our conduct and Christian testimony. Biblical convictions are our code of conduct that we live by, which can be seen by others on the outside. But they are developed from who we are on the inside, and from what we believe to be true and right from what we learn in the Bible.

For instance, I have a conviction about not missing any church services at our local church. That conviction is based upon the biblical principle found in Hebrews 10:23 – 25:

*"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)*

I am not under any law or commandment to go to Sunday School, the Sunday morning worship service, Sunday evening, or the mid-week Bible Study and Prayer Meeting, but I believe God wants me to do that. It is my conviction that God wants me to be in church whenever the doors are open unless I am sick. For me to miss a church service would be a sin because *"...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17)

A conviction is not the same as a preference. Preferences are what we choose to do or not do that help us maintain our convictions and adhere to our understanding of God's will.

#### B. Daniel's determination blossomed in his life. (v. 8)

Daniel obviously had a heart that was tender toward God and determined to do God's will. At an early age, Daniel was taught that eating something that was sacrificed to a false god or idol was wrong, and he refused to do it. He also would not eat any animal that God declared to be unclean. (Leviticus 11:44 – 47) He also refused to drink the king's wine, perhaps because of a conviction against intoxicating beverages. Remember Daniel was a prince.

*"It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more." (Proverbs 31:4-7)*

Possibly, Daniel and his friends could have been Nazarites, who had vowed not to drink wine. (Numbers 6)

Note – we are under no mandatory dietary restrictions today for spiritual reasons. (Acts 10:9 – 16)

*"But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." (1 Corinthians 8:8)*

However, we may choose to fast, or abstain from certain things because of spiritual reasons: (1 Corinthians 8:7 – 13; 10:14 - 33)

C. God blessed Daniel with favor in the eyes of the prince of the eunuchs. (vs. 9 – 10)

Daniel not only had convictions, but he also had an excellent spirit (Daniel 5:12 and 6:3). Daniel was likeable, and easy to get along with. Many people who have strong convictions wear them as a badge of honor and sometimes think themselves better than others who do not share their convictions. Daniel was apparently not haughty and prideful about his beliefs. People liked Daniel and as a result, God used him to cause people to be attracted to Daniel's God.

D. God blessed Daniel with wisdom (vs. 11 – 14)

Daniel had an idea. He requested that he and his companions be permitted temporarily to eat a diet of vegetables (pulse), and if at the end of the trial period they appeared healthy, then they should be allowed to continue. Because their overseers wanted to see these young boys succeed, they agreed to the test.

E. God blessed Daniel with success (vs. 15 – 16)

At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his friends looked healthier than all the others that were given the king's meat and wine, so Melzar permitted them to continue eating their vegetarian diet.

None of what would happen later in the Book of Daniel would have happened had Daniel not passed this first test. There were many Hebrews captives that came into Babylon, but none would be used of God like Daniel, because Daniel possessed great Biblical convictions and the character necessary to live by them even when the pressure was on to give up on them. Daniel also possessed the kindness and compassion necessary to win over his captors, and make his God look good.

### III. King Nebuchadnezzar's Deduction in Daniel (vs. 17 – 21)

The king was certainly impressed with his first encounter with Daniel and his three friends.

There were three years between the time that Daniel was taken captive and his first encounter with King Nebuchadnezzar.

In verse 17, we learn that during these three years God continued to bless Daniel and his three friends with "knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom". God equipped these four men with what they needed to perform His will. God equips the called.

Wiersbe states:

"If you want to make a living, you get training; and if you want to make a life, you add education. But if you want to have a ministry for God, you must have divine gifts and divine help. Training and education are very important, but they are not substitutes for the ability and wisdom that only God can give." (Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (p. 17). Colorado Springs, CO: Victor.)

These four men were found faithful and were thus called of God to represent Him in the Kingdom of Babylon, and God gave them what they needed to do His will. (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:1 – 8)

*"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*

(Philippians 4:19)

James tells us that if we need wisdom today, we need only to ask of God:

*"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."* (James 1:5-8)



Notice also that Daniel, particularly, “had understanding in all visions and dreams”, meaning that God revealed things to him prophetically.

Joseph was used of God in this way also. Joseph dreamed himself (Genesis 37:5 – 11), and he also interpreted the dreams of others (Genesis 40:5 – 23; 41:1 – 45). God has also used dreams to reveal truth to Gideon (Judges 7:13 – 15), Solomon (1 Kings 3:5 – 15), Joseph (Matthew 1:20, 2:12 – 22, and Pilate’s wife (Matthew 27:19).

God also warned against false dreams:

*"Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."*

(Jeremiah 23:32)

*"For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd." (Zechariah 10:2)*

Joel prophesied that dreams would be used in the “last days”:

*"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:" (Joel 2:28)*

*"And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:" (Acts 2:17)*

God would use Daniel to not only interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, but also to declare the dream, which the king himself had forgotten. (Daniel 2)

Verses 18 – 20 reveal that Daniel and his three companions were noticeably “better” than the “magicians and astrologers”. The king personally “enquired of them”, which means he tested them to see if they were qualified to serve in his cabinet as his advisors.

It is important to remember that though these four Hebrew men were trained and educated by the Babylonians, the knowledge and wisdom that caused them to excel were given by God. There is some benefit to, I suppose, to worldly knowledge at times; but

there can also be a great deal of harmful information learned from “counsel” or instruction of the “ungodly”. God’s wisdom, however,

"...is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." (Proverbs 8:11)

Wiersbe explains what these “magicians and astrologers” did, as well as the “sorcerers” and enchanters” who are mentioned in chapter two:

“Magicians” were men who dealt in the occult, while “enchanters” used incantations to accomplish their purposes. “Sorcerers” specialized in casting spells, “astrologers” studied the movements of the stars and their influence on events, and “diviners” sought to see the future by using various methods. Of course, all of these were forbidden by the Law of Moses (Deut. 18:9–13). Daniel and his friends had to work alongside these men, yet they remained pure and gave a powerful testimony for the Lord. (Wiersbe, p. 19)

Verse 21 tells us that Daniel “continued” unto 539 B.C., which was the first year of King Cyrus of Persia’s reign. (Ezra 1:1). According to Daniel 10:1, he lived and prophesied at least two years beyond that.

## **Conclusion**

This first chapter of Daniel reveals that Daniel and his three friends who were just a small part of the many who were taken into captivity in that first deportation into Babylon were different than all the others. They stood apart from the rest of the crowd because even under these very difficult circumstances, they were determined to live for the Lord; they lived life on purpose, and they lived life for the purpose of glorifying the Lord.

Paul mentioned in his Letter to the Ephesians that our lives as believers are supposed to be lived “to the praise of his (God’s) glory” (Ephesians 1:12, 14). Daniel, Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah certainly were great examples of that truth.

What about you? What about Me? Do our lives bring glory to the Lord? Are we standing apart from the crowd in that we live our lives purposing to stand for God and His truth even when everybody else, including most Christians have given in, and doing almost everything the lost world is doing.

Live your life on purpose. Resist the impulse to blend in and be like everyone else. Be different in a good way. Live your life for the purpose of serving and glorifying the Lord!