

## Daniel 1 - A Healthy Body and Spirit <sup>1</sup>

**Before the Lesson:** Prepare equipment to show the video, Book of Daniel Summary, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cSC9uobtPM&t=533s>.

**Fellowship question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

Do you go by a different name or title depending on the person or setting? (eg., “Daddy,” “Doctor,” Mr., a nickname or pet name, etc.)

Do you have dual citizenship? If so, what benefits do you see in having both? If not, what country would you be tempted to have dual citizenship with and why?

### Information

Today, we begin a series of lessons from the Book of Daniel, which is interesting because it is really two books—or at least two kinds of literature. The book begins with five “court stories,” which are told in chapters 1-6. Then, we have a series of Daniel’s visions, which fill chapters 7-12. For this series of lessons, we will focus on the court stories.

“The Book of Daniel contains the writings of several authors working at different times. The radically divergent content of the two halves of the book requires this thesis, as does the fact that the book is written in two languages...Daniel 2:4b-7:28 is written in Aramaic; the balance is written in late Biblical Hebrew.”<sup>2</sup>

The book is set “in the context of the seventy years of exile covered by the sequence of stories and visions, from the Babylonian kings via Darius the Mede to Cyrus the Persian. Throughout the period of the empires, the people of God live in a tricky three-way relationship with God and with the imperial power. That relationship works harmoniously in Daniel 1, but succeeding chapters will portray it involving tension and conflict but also reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup>

- Show the video found at the Bible Project website, Book of Daniel Summary (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cSC9uobtPM&t=533s>).

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<sup>1</sup> This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2025. More lessons may be found at [greatbibleteachers.com](http://greatbibleteachers.com).

<sup>2</sup> W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>3</sup> John Goldingay, *Daniel: Revised Edition*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 2019), 151.

Ask if there are any new insights or questions following this video.

Let's hear the first story, which is the first chapter of the Book of Daniel. Although one of us will read, I hope all will follow along with your own Bible or app.

- Ask a class member to read Daniel 1.

As healthy and handsome young men, Daniel and his friends are selected to be in a highly selective leadership track. As exiles from a foreign land, what choice do you think these Jewish men had?

These four men were to learn the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

“In the Hebrew Bible, [Chaldean] most often refers to Babylon and the Babylonians. By the Hellenistic period, however, the word developed a secondary meaning, referring to a class of divinatory experts...The language and literature of the Chaldeans would thus refer to the technical literature of these divinatory experts, composed and transmitted in Akkadian cuneiform.”<sup>4</sup>

Here is a description of the Chaldeans written by an ancient Greek historian:

“For being assigned to the service of the gods, they spend their entire life in study, their greatest renown being in the field of astrology. But they occupy themselves largely with soothsaying as well, making predictions of future events, and in some cases by purifications, in others by sacrifices, and in others by some other charms they attempt to effect the averting of evil things and the fulfillment of the good. They are also skilled in soothsaying by the flight of birds, and they give out interpretations of both dreams and portents.”<sup>5</sup>

The first act of education involves a name change. Sometimes name changes have charming or funny stories. We gain a nickname or a pet name that sticks with us for the rest of our lives. You may know the name Charles Schulz, the artist who created the Peanuts characters. But he never went by Charles or Charley. He went by a nickname given to him when he was only three years old, “Sparky.” He insisted that everyone call him Sparky.

What do you think was the purpose of the renaming of these four young men?

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<sup>4</sup> Carol A. Newsome with Brennan W. Breed, *Daniel: A Commentary* The Old Testament Library (Louisville: The Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 44f.

<sup>5</sup> Newsome and Breed, 44, quoting Diodorus Siculus, an ancient Greek historian.

“The renaming of the first characters is the first stage in what is intended to be a thoroughgoing transformation of their identities and roles...a rite of passage. There is separation and seclusion, a liminal period in which instructors teach specialized knowledge required for filling new roles, special food, and new names. Entering as young deportees from Judah, the characters will graduate as members of the Babylonian administration.”<sup>6</sup>

The four men did not have a choice of what their new names would be. But Daniel insisted that they must be given a chance to choose what their daily food would be. Scholars debate why Daniel drew the line at this point. I'll share some of their thoughts - but first, why do you think Daniel risked his life by arguing with the king's law on this point?

Scholar's thoughts:

1. “Neither the biblical nor the extrabiblical texts allow us to conclude that Daniel's refusal to eat the king's rich food is an act of obedience to known law, not even the laws of *kashrut*<sup>7</sup> which had not yet come into existence so far as we know...Joyce Baldwin takes her clue from Daniel 11:26, the only other text in which that rare word *pat-bang*, ‘rich food,’ occurs. As that text makes clear, those who shared the king's board also entered into a covenantal relationship with him; they became his courtiers, his shadow government... ‘The defilement he feared was not so much a ritual as a moral defilement, arising from the subtle flattery of gifts and favours which entailed hidden implications of loyal support, however dubious the king's future policies might prove to be.’”<sup>8</sup>
2. “The king's food represents power, both because of its source and because of the nature of the food itself. Meat, a rarity in the diet of ordinary persons in antiquity, would have been part of the king's rations...Wine, too, is a food that connotes power, not only because of the labor involved and the mysterious process of fermentation, but also because of its inebriating effect...By feeding the young men from his own rations, Nebuchadnezzar directs to them some of the abundant strength that flows from a powerful king.”<sup>9</sup>
3. “Believers in other contexts or in other cultures might have identified their sticking point elsewhere...Perhaps part of the point is that a line should be drawn somewhere. Total

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<sup>6</sup> Newsome and Breed, 46.

<sup>7</sup> “The Hebrew word *kashrut* means ‘ritual suitability’ and refers to the Jewish dietary laws. These dictate how to prepare, store, and eat food and how to slaughter animals that are permitted for consumption. Foods that are permitted to eat under *kashrut* are ‘kosher.’ Non-kosher foods are known as ‘treif.’” - [www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-kashrut](http://www.jmberlin.de/en/topic-kashrut), accessed 01-16-2025.

<sup>8</sup> Towner, 25. Quoting Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978.), 83.

<sup>9</sup> Newsome and Breed, 50.

assimilation is to be avoided. Food, in particular, is determinative of identity; it is part of being ‘embodied.’ ...It is common for an expatriate community to maintain its distinctiveness partly by maintaining its distinctive diet...The difficulty in discerning precisely what was defiling about the Babylonians’ food may indicate that it was nothing more conceptualized than that it was Babylonian.”<sup>10</sup>

4. “The food was fit for a king, but in Daniels’ judgment it was not fit for a servant of the King of kings. The effect set the Jews apart in sharp relief from the common run of aliens and novices at the Babylonian academy of wisdom. In that sharp identity lay strength; the Jews were going to have to be reckoned with!”<sup>11</sup>

The ten-day test went well. Daniel and his friends thrived on their selected diet.

“That Nebuchadnezzar himself conducts the interview and evaluates the candidates not only characterizes him as an intelligent and discerning monarch but also as someone who likes to be in control of the process from beginning to end. The delicious irony of the story, of course, is that the reader knows what the king does not know, that in the space away from his presence his underlings have acted contrary to his express commands. The king who would be always in control does not, in fact, control his servants in all respects. Moreover, there is another monarch, far more powerful and far more in control of events than Nebuchadnezzar, who has prepared these exceptional young men for his service.”<sup>12</sup>

“The story’s central question is ‘How could these four famous young men have gained such success in the pagan court, without being tainted by it?’ And the chapter...assures us that Daniel and his friends in exile gained success in a way that avoided losing holiness. They proved that holiness was the source of health and that God was the source of discernment and the power behind history.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

Jesus told us that we were to be in the world, but not of the world. That is easier said than done. There is a tension between Christ and culture. What can we learn from today’s story about being in but not of the world?

The “line in the sand” may shift from believer to believer, from time to time, and from culture to culture. There are currently cultures in which smoking tobacco disqualifies a person from church

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<sup>10</sup> Goldingay, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Towner, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Newsome and Breed, 51.

<sup>13</sup> Goldingay, 152.

membership. Decades ago, in our country, to play cards was a line marker - something good church-going people refused to do. I've read minutes of Quaker meetings when people who played the fiddle were excluded from the church community because that was considered to be an instrument of the devil. I served in a community where many Baptist churches had it in their constitution and bylaws that the pastor was never to remarry a person who had been divorced, on penalty of losing their ministry role immediately. Yet, there *is* a time and place to take a stand, to say, as Luther did, "here I stand, I can do no other," isn't there?

How have you seen "lines in the sand" evolve?

How do you determine your "here I stand" positions?

"We are called to be citizens of two worlds, neither surrendering one citizenship by assimilation nor surrendering the other by forming a ghetto."<sup>14</sup>

As citizens of heaven, we have hope that God will redeem and transform our world. We may sometimes feel that we are exiled. But...

"The book [of Daniel] glows with a deep conviction that God will not fail to achieve his redemptive purpose in the world. It glows with the trust that tyranny and oppression in all their forms are not the wave of the future but that the outcome of the human experience is finally the vindication of faithful obedience, goodness, and truth. God wins in the end and all who seek to keep the faith with God are winners as well! That is a faith that can sustain the saints in good times and bad."<sup>15</sup>

The Book of Daniel's message is "Do not settle for the status quo. Do not settle for the world as it is presented to us. Do not settle for the inevitability of what is said to be inevitable. We can hope for more than this. God will triumph. Because we believe this to be certain and true, we can live courageously now, and move with courage into a better future."<sup>16</sup>

Close in a prayer something like this: *Jesus, you came to live in a particular time in a certain culture within a particular country with its unique culture. Yet, you came because "God so loved the world," all of it. All of us. You were rejected by that culture, as we in our culture too often reject you. Show us grace. Give us grace for others. Today, we pray for wisdom as you gave it to Daniel. Help us to live as dual citizens, faithful to you and gracious to all. Amen.*

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<sup>14</sup> Goldengay, 169.

<sup>15</sup> Towner, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Towner, 15.