

Daniel Chapter 1 — Daniel Purposed in His Heart

Shinar/Babylon as the Seat of Self-Exaltation; Zechariah 5; Adonai vs. Jehovah; Renaming; The Diet Test as Subjection; Proverbs 16:7; Colossians 1:9; First Adam and Second Adam

Scripture Reading: Daniel 1:1–21; Genesis 11:1–9; Zechariah 5:5–11; Proverbs 16:7; Colossians 1:9; Psalm 119:97–100; Psalm 25:14

“And Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself with the king’s food, nor with the wine which he drank.” (Daniel 1:8)

“When a man’s ways please Jehovah, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” (Proverbs 16:7)

Shinar: Babylon and the Tower of Babel

Daniel 1:2 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar carried the vessels of the house of God into the land of Shinar. The first mention of Shinar in the Bible is Genesis 11:2 — the plain where the whole earth gathered after the flood and built the Tower of Babel. Babylon, the city of Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, derives its name from Babel. The connection is deliberate and moral. What were men trying to do at Babel? Not merely to build the tallest structure. Men still compete to build tall towers; that was not the point. Babel was man’s first concerted, collective expression of self-exaltation — reaching toward heaven not to worship God but to make a name for themselves, to set themselves above anything that is called God.

That character belongs to Babylon throughout Scripture and appears again figuratively at the end of Revelation. It is the seat of everything that exalts itself against God. Daniel and his companions were not taken to some neutral location; they were taken to the moral center of human self-exaltation. The Lord's dealings with his people were now concentrated there.

Zechariah 5:5–11 adds a striking detail: the prophet sees a vision of wickedness — a woman in an ephah — carried by two women with wings like storks and set down in the land of Shinar, where a house is built for it. That which represented wickedness and perversion in the land of Israel is removed and installed at the seat of all wickedness, where the Lord will deal with it definitively. When Revelation describes the fall of great Babylon, it is dealing with that same concentrated wickedness gathered to its proper place for judgment. Daniel and his companions are in the land of Shinar, surrounded by all of this — and it is precisely there that the Lord's faithful ones are called to stand.

Adonai, Not Jehovah: The Title That Marks the Times of the Gentiles

Verse 2 says the Lord gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. The word translated Lord here is Adonai — the one who reigns over all — not Jehovah, which was God's covenant name to his people. When Moses asked who sent him, God said, tell them I AM has sent me — that is Jehovah. But when God hands the kingdom of Judah to a Gentile conqueror, he acts as Adonai, the sovereign governor of all, not as Jehovah the covenant God working for Israel. The times of the Gentiles had begun; government had been taken from Israel's hands and given to Gentiles. In that context it is not appropriate to say Jehovah gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand, because that would imply a covenant relationship that was no longer being expressed. Every word is exact.

Renaming: The Assimilation Program

Nebuchadnezzar's three-year program for the best and brightest captives was a total assimilation project. Language, learning, diet, and name — everything was to be Babylonian. Their Hebrew names each bore testimony to the God of Israel: Daniel (God is my judge), Hananiah (whom Jehovah graciously gave), Mishael (who is as God), and Azariah (whom Jehovah aids). Their Babylonian replacements were named after Babylonian gods, as Nebuchadnezzar himself later confirms about Belteshazzar in chapter 4. The intent was to erase every trace of their identity as God's people and remake them as loyal servants of Babylon's order.

The names these young men carried into captivity also speak to us about their families. No parent was consulted before the names were given; parents named their children. That Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah all bore names honoring Jehovah tells us something about the households they came from. They were not raised in indifference. Godly parents had placed the name of God on their children before any of this began. That early formation would prove decisive.

Daniel Purposed in His Heart: The Foundation of Everything

Everything in the rest of the book of Daniel — the interpretation of dreams, the deliverance from the lions, the great prophetic revelations — traces back to verse 8: Daniel purposed in his heart. Before any gift was given, before any wisdom was displayed, before any king was impressed, Daniel made a decision of the will that he would not pollute himself with the king's food.

The issue with the king's food was not its quality. It was subjection. An Israelite under the Mosaic law was not permitted to eat certain animals — those without a cloven hoof and the habit of chewing the cud, seafood without scales, blood, and much else. If Nebuchadnezzar served horses, pigs, shellfish, or animals improperly slaughtered, a faithful Israelite could not eat them. But the deeper

issue is what the world always wants first: it wants us to stop being subject to the Lord. As long as a believer is useful and not too conspicuous about his faith, the world is happy to use him. The moment he insists on subjection to God in something that matters to the world's system, the friendship cools quickly.

Daniel was not reckless in pressing this point. He was both principled and wise. He asked the prince of the eunuchs, not for an exemption based on his religion, but for a ten-day trial that the prince could evaluate with his own eyes. He did not ask a man with no faith to exercise faith; he worked within what that man had — his senses. God then undertook so that the observable result confirmed what Daniel had requested. Proverbs 16:7 explains the mechanism: when a man's ways please Jehovah, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. The Lord moved for Daniel not because Daniel managed the situation skillfully but because Daniel's purpose of heart was pleasing to God.

The Order: Faith and Love First, Then Wisdom

Colossians 1:9 shows Paul praying for believers from the day he heard of their faith and love, asking that they might be filled with the full knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Faith and love come first; wisdom follows. The same order appears in Daniel 1. First Daniel and his companions are faithful to what they know about subjection to God's law. They love the law, as David loved it in Psalm 119. Verse 17 then records: God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. The wisdom was given after and because of the faithfulness, not before it.

It is easy to love the Lord and keep his word when surrounded by godly influence — in a faithful family, in the land of Judah with its temple and its community of believers. The test comes when all of that is stripped away and the believer stands alone in a hostile environment where the only resource is the Lord himself. That

is Daniel's position. No family, no temple, no community of faith — only the Lord and three companions. And Daniel purposed in his heart. That is the foundation.

The First Adam and the Second Adam; Isaiah and Cyrus

The chapter closes with a note that Daniel continued unto the first year of King Cyrus. This is two kings after Nebuchadnezzar — Darius, then Cyrus. Isaiah had prophesied about Cyrus by name 150 years before Daniel was born. The God of the heavens knows the end from the beginning. Daniel himself, long before he was conceived, was part of God's eternal purposes. His faithfulness in the matter of the king's food was not an isolated act of personal piety; it was the necessary foundation for his being the instrument through which God would reveal his mind to the Gentile rulers of the world.

The chapter holds together the contrast of the two Adams that runs through all of Scripture. Adam in the garden had everything perfect and still rebelled, setting self above God. Joseph in Potiphar's house and in prison, falsely accused and forgotten, showed no recorded complaint and no deviation from faithfulness. Daniel in the palace of Babylon, with his life at the mercy of an absolute despot, purposed in his heart not to defile himself. And the Lord Jesus — in the wilderness, hungry after forty days, tested by the devil — met every temptation with the word of God from the book of Deuteronomy and walked out of that wilderness in the power of the Spirit. In each of these, and supremely in the Lord Jesus, the character of the second Adam is seen: subjection to God in every circumstance, from the smallest detail of what to eat to the cross itself. Daniel's first chapter is a portrait of that character at work in a captive young man in Babylon.

And Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not pollute himself... And God granted Daniel favour and mercy.