

Daniel 1:1–9 (ESV)

**1** In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. **2** And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. **3** Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, **4** youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. **5** The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. **6** Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. **7** And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. **8** But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. **9** And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,

We are going to begin using the ESV version of the Bible rather than the New King James. I believe it to be more accurate. If that causes any problems for you, please let me know.

We are also doing things a little unusual this morning. Normally we start with some overviews by speakers who are very good at that sort of thing. But I knew there might be some special guests, so I wanted to preach this morning. We will do an overview of Daniel 1 through 6 with Pastor Pawson next week. Then we have an Irish gentleman, Paul Foster, to give an overview of Chapters 7 through 12. You will enjoy his accent.

I will be gone next Sunday.

So, why the book of Daniel? And why now?

Do you look at what is going on in our world and feel like **wickedness is winning**?

Do you look at the corruption in our government and **fear** for what is coming?

Do the laws that are being passed seem designed for **wicked purposes**? Do you fear they might put us in a bad spot, where Christians might be **persecuted**? Does it trouble you that the world **singles out** Christians to **malign** them? Do the **elites** in power have an agenda against us?

Do you find that it is very easy to compromise your biblical standards in order to enjoy what **the world offers**?

Does the **content** of what the **world is teaching** in its educational systems trouble you?

If any of those things are true about us, we have come to the right book.

Daniel is a book that can comfort our souls and relieve our fears. It is a book about how God does **what** God wants, **when** God wants, to **whoever** He wants.

Daniel teaches us that this world is not out of control to God. Everything in it serves his purpose. Even wickedness is used for good.

Many of you are employed in secular **work** in the secular **market place**. Daniel is a man who was in a similar spot. He was in an environment that was hostile to his belief in God. There were **expectations** that he faced **from his supervisors** that were contrary to his faith. Daniel lived in an environment where it was very hard to stand up for his God. The world around him was **making him choose** whether he would be faithful or cave.

The government rulers he worked for were tyrannical. While we might fear **getting fired**, Daniel's coworkers feared **being eaten**. My team at work has a saying when things are going bad. The saying is, "**Well, they can't eat us.**" Well in Babylon, the lions **could** and **would**. So the stakes were higher for Daniel than they are for us.

We will also see, if we are careful, that God lacks no ability to have his people **promoted**, even though the whole world seems against them. It is not unusual in scripture for God to arrange for his people to have pockets in the secular world where they **find favor** with their employers, or leaders. God arranged for Daniel and his friends to **find favor** in the **most unlikely places** and in the most unlikely **ways**.

I have often been impressed with how **fickle** the corporate world can be. I may do ten things exceptionally and fail at one task. If that failure is highly visible, it can drastically effect one's status. And the reverse is just as true. I have learned that in the corporate world, I simply need to trust God for whether he wants me promoted or demoted. I need to do the best job I can do. Then I need to trust that God will do what God wants. It is not ultimately my employer who decides where to put me. It is God who orchestrates that. It takes away a lot of fear.

But I think one of the biggest thing that jumped out to me, as I began studying Daniel this time around, is the pattern of how God brought attention to Himself. And it is **COSTLY**.

Look in Daniel 2. What platform does God create before He displays His power? He made Daniel and his friends “wanted men”. They were to be put to death. Why? Had they done anything wrong? No. They just happened to be working in the wrong department. They were in the “magician, enchanters, and sorcerers” division. And they were facing a rapid and permanent downsizing. Kevin and Tyler, imagine if NFP decided to kill everyone in the telephony department because RingCentral could not do this function or that function. That is what Daniel was facing.

Now think about that. If you were Daniel and his team, would you have viewed this as a **golden opportunity**? I think it is safe to say **none of us** would view it that way. They were going to die and there appeared to be nothing that would stop it. People were certainly watching how Daniel and his team faced this. All eyes would have been on him. And **that is exactly** what God wanted. Then God revealed the King’s dream to Daniel. And God was **honored** and Daniel was **promoted**. I say all this to point out that God had a Divine purpose for this horrendous situation. God created the backdrop of bodily threat to portray His own wisdom and strength. Sometimes the more dramatic the threat, the more opportunity for God’s glory.

We need to keep this in mind as God places us in difficult, threatening situations. We cannot know how God intends to use it. He tells us in general terms that **it will be for our good** and how it should **shape our faith** and our **character**. But Daniel did not know that the threat to his life held the opportunity for greater advancement in the King’s business than he could have ever imagined. God often creates a stage of conflict to use to glorify Himself. We must keep this in mind.

Then in Daniel three Nebuchadnezzar creates a huge statue and demanded that people worshipped it. Why did God allow that? Why did God not stop this thing? Now Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are in the crosshairs. What was the purpose? It just looked like an **arbitrary** use of the **elites** for evil. That is how Daniel’s team would have experienced it. But it was **more** than that. The situation was created for God to be glorified in such a way that no one could **deny** the **power of God**. The King became the evangelist. He sent out an amazing endorsement of the one True God to all his kingdom. Everyone heard about the true God because of that event. And the team **got promoted** as well.

Then in Daniel 6, Daniel fell into a political trap. He had two coworkers who wanted the top job, but the King wanted to give the job to Daniel. So they did all they could do to **sabotage** Daniel's chances. Again Daniel's life is threatened. What for? So God could declare His glory **again** to a secular idolatrous world. We really need to see our world the way the book of Daniel portrays it. The **Bidens** and **Putins** of the world are putty in God's hands. At any point in time he could drive them to madness like He did to Nebuchadnezzar. He could put an idea in their head to do anything. He could create favor between them and a Christian that can make all the difference.

This is the God we have.

And **situations of conflict** are often the **stage** that God will set for **glorifying Himself**. We need not fear them.

So why the book of Daniel?

Because we need the lessons this book teaches us so we can faithfully and courageously stand for Christ in our evil world.

Now lets go to the text.

**1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.**

I love the Bible in that it describes events in **time and space** that can be looked into. It allows us to **verify its truth** by looking at **world history**.

So this is the first conquering of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It was in 605 BC. There would be two more later. Nebuchadnezzar had hoped to have Israel be a vassal state, governed by Babylon, but its people living in their original territory. But the Judeans were very resistant to outside governments telling them what to do. So eventually Nebuchadnezzar displaced almost everyone. Scripture gives us bits and pieces of all that history.

So, in our text, the King took his spoils and put them in the temple of his god, Bel. That was the common thing to do at the time. Remember these vessels because we will see them later.

Also note this- **the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand**

Things on this earth often do not have the cause and effect we ascribe to them. A historian might say that Babylon conquered Judah because they were more powerful. That is not the real reason. Babylon conquered Judah because God wanted it so. He was punishing Judah for their rebellion. God wanted His people

conquered and in a foreign land. He wanted the world to know that He is not to be crossed. Fear of God is a good thing. It is where wisdom starts.

**3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.**

Evidently this was not uncommon. The king wanted the best of the best from the Judeans to serve him. The word for “**youths**” was probably young men between 12 and 14 years old. They had to be from the families of nobles or of the King of Judah's lineage. They had to be **good looking** without any obvious physical abnormalities. Then they had to already be somewhat educated. They had to **know stuff** and have the ability to use the stuff **they knew** well. And it looks like they were to have special gifted-nesses. They were to be endowed with knowledge. I think this is describing someone who is a quick study. The king is looking for what we might think of as a model student who has an appearance that would be pleasant to look at. Carla often describes these kinds of quick studies and excellent learners as they pass through her classes. (Jay is one of those.)

And this class would consist of 4 Judeans, along with other nationalities probably. These children were to go to the **Public School System of Babylon** to be indoctrinated by the **Babylonian world**. And there was nothing their parents could do about it.

It is interesting that the children that were selected were also very **spiritually faithful**. We will see that is true by their future choices. Maybe that fact had something to do with how scholarly they were. Or maybe God simply ordained to use his faithful children for this purpose.

**5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.**

We could think of this as a **mandatory scholarship**. They had room, board, and free classes. But they also had little choice in the matter. They were going to receive the best education Babylonian money could buy for 3 years. After the 3 years they will do exactly what the King tells them to do. They will be the king's attendants.

**6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.**

Now this is important. We might get the idea that the education that the Hebrew children were being offered was **simply information**. We might think there was no **spiritual agenda** behind it. That it was **neutral**. But this text lets us know it was distinctly designed to have the students abandon **their** God and **follow Bel**. When the world offers education, there will be an **agenda** in place. It may take a while for it to **become visible** and for it to be fully **placed into action**. But the devil is the prince and power of the air. Remember that he is in charge of the world system. He must still obtain God's permission, but we already know what the devil would do if he were free to do anything. The devil wants to strip true belief in God by whatever method he has at his disposal. So we can expect that agenda to make its way into the government schools.

Here in our text we see the Babylonian school **agenda**. It is found in the meaning of the names.

**Daniel** means **God my judge**

**Belteshazzar** means **Bel's prince**

**Hananiah** means whom **Jehovah hath favored**

**Shadrach** means **illuminated by the Sun-God**

**Mishael** means **Who is comparable to God**

**Meshach** means **who is comparable to Shach** a Babylonian goddess

**Azariah** means whom **Jehovah helps**

**Abed-nego** means **servant of the shining fire**

There was nothing neutral about this education. It was intended to make them stop worshipping the one true God to a substitute idol of the Babylonians making. It was to cause them to identify as **anything** but a person of God. That may help demystify what is going on in government schools today. Nothing has changed. Be careful when you regard the world's education as something that is neutral. Even if it were to start there, it will not remain there.

Ok so the obvious intent is to rob these Hebrew children of their faith in God.

That helps us understand the use of the word "But" in the next sentence.

**8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.**

Daniel could see what these people were trying to do to him and his friends. And Daniel made a resolution to himself to not allow that to happen. He would not worship that false god.

Here it looks like Daniel arises as **the leader** in this group of children. He is the one listed as **first resolving** how to handle this situation. And he led in this plan to live faithfully.

Now why did Daniel see it as important to **not eat and drink** the king's provision? Evidently it was a common practice that when food was prepared for a group like this, a small amount would be taken out and thrown on the ground as an offering to the gods, to sanctify the whole meal for everyone. So, to eat the food was to **participate in idolatry**.

Now, while Daniel and his team could not refuse to be named with idolatrous names, they could try to say no to eating idolatrous food.

Now kids. Think about this. A bunch of adults come into your world and they take you away from your parents. Maybe you are 12 or 13 or 14 years old. And then you are given really really good food. But for you to eat it would go against what God said.

What would you do? How hard do you think it would be to try to get this changed. And after all, it was good food. And they were just early teenagers. And they were dealing with powerful adults.

That is the situation that Daniel and his friends were in. This would not have been **easy** at all. So we can guess that they really needed to **get their courage up** to speak to the guy that was in charge of them.

**But they did.** Daniel asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow Daniel and his friends to do something different. And he probably had to explain why eating the food offered to idols was so bad. So what he said could have been **very offensive** to the chief of the Eunuchs.

But he did it anyway because it was the right thing to do. Would we have had the courage to do that at that age? Young people, you need to do everything you can when you are young so that you will stand up for Christ, no matter how difficult or unpopular your situation is.

**9 And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,**

This is very very important to understand. What would have happened if God **had not** gotten Daniel into his bosses good graces? As far as we can tell there would have been no book of Daniel in the Bible. God's plan included getting Daniel on

the good side of the head eunuch. What does that tell you about life in the secular world?

There are a lot of **self help gurus** who tell you that all your advancement relies upon **your performance**. And that is how it appears to us. But that is not how it **is** according to our text.

When I got hired at the bank, the CEO, Bill Grant, was one of Mike's good friends in high school. That relationship benefited me. Then, as he got to know me, he liked me. So even when I did some things that were troublesome to him, and I did a few of those things, I had the benefit of the doubt. Now, I would like to believe I was in his favor due to my winsome personality, but I know that is not true. God placed me in his good favor for my benefit.

And what if I simply cannot **get on the good favor** of someone? Does that mean God is **against** me? Does that mean I am **overly offensive**? No. **Sometimes** it is a result of things we said or did. But **often** it is due to God having a different purpose for our situation. The good thing to know is that our **favor** isn't **totally reliant** upon our **behavior**. And we will always have as **much of it** or as **little of it** as is needed in our situation for our good and God's glory.

Even when we make mistakes, the outcome is still in God's hands. I have made some doozies, and I have learned I do not need to fear the outcome of those either. God has it all handled.

The **favor** that God gave Daniel was to be used when we take up this text in a few weeks. Because Daniel had his boss's favor, his boss was willing to **take a chance** on Daniel. And remember, people weren't just **fired** if they did a bad job. They were often **killed**. So it took a **great deal of good favor** to get this man to take these kinds of risk on the request of some Hebrew children.

I hope you can see already in our study that this is not so much a story about the amazing things **Daniel and his friends** did, although they certainly did some amazing things. The story is about **what God did**. So far, **God** handed over the land of Judah to a godless king and **God** gave Daniel favor with the chief of the eunuchs. It will be exciting to dive into what else God is going to do.

I think this week a good application would be rethink our ideas of cause and effect. Do we really think that God orchestrates things like who we meet and how they regard us? Do we really think he has absolute control on what world leaders think and say and do? Do we really think he is powerless to change anything to make it what He wants it to be.

It might **also** be good to consider what platforms God had to create before He was going to display His glory. Will we **welcome** that opportunity to give God



glory, even if it places us in distressing situations and physical danger? Will we **have faith in God** that He has something good in mind **somehow, some way**? It is easy when we can see the end of the story. Sure they can throw me in the lion's den if I know the lions won't eat me. But that was not Daniel's story. He reached Gods glorification by **risking everything** for God.