



DANIEL 1:1-21

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, 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." 14 So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. 16 So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. 17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. 20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. 21 And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

STRUCTURE

- I. **Setting: King Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem (1)**
- II. **God gives Jerusalem, its kings, and its sacred objects into Babylon's hand (2)**
 - a. God, not Babylon, authors Israel's defeat
 - b. God's sovereignty extends even over the loss of His own sanctuary
- III. **God gives Daniel and his friends favor for holy resistance (3-16)**
 - a. Daniel wisely navigates cultural pressure—yielding where possible, resisting where necessary (3-8)
 - b. God grants favor to pursue obedience with wisdom (9-14)
 - c. God vindicates quiet faithfulness (15-16)
- IV. **God gives Daniel and his friends learning, skill, and prophetic insight (17-20)**
 - a. God, not Babylon, is the true giver of wisdom (17)
 - b. God rewards tested obedience with superior wisdom (18-20; cf. 1:12-15 "ten days" → "ten times")
- V. **Setting: Daniel remains in power from Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus (21)**

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Jewish and Christian tradition ascribes authorship of this book to the one whose name it bears. Scholars who do not believe in prophecy suggest that someone wrote it during the Maccabean crisis (167-164 BC), but they do not base this on evidence. Rather, they disbelieve in prophecy. They do not think it possible that Daniel literally predicted the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms, the battles they would fight, or the crises Israel would face—including the Maccabean one. The irony of the late-date proponents is that they bake their conclusion into their argument. When they encounter prophecy that is fulfilled with stunning specificity, they don't reconsider their assumption; they redefine the text as "not prophecy." In other words, Daniel is dated late not because the evidence demands it, but because accurate prophecy is ruled out in advance. That's not historical criticism; it's philosophical naturalism

masquerading as biblical scholarship. The simplest explanation is the one Jewish and Christian readers have held for millennia: Daniel lived in exile, saw what God revealed, and wrote it down.

Daniel's ministry spans from Nebuchadnezzar's first campaign against Jerusalem (1:1) to the reign of Cyrus (1:21)—a period of sixty-six years, from 605-539 B.C. This not only suggests an early date; it also proclaims a theological reality: political power is temporary, but faithfulness to Yahweh is not. Daniel is a book about the rise and fall of empires, the endurance of God's kingdom, and how faithfulness navigates the tension this creates.

As for genre, Daniel is a hybrid book. Like Genesis, Esther, and Acts, the first six chapters read as historical court narratives, telling stories of faithfulness under pressure in pagan power structures. These narratives function as wisdom-in-action—not proverbial wisdom like Proverbs, but lived wisdom that teaches how to fear God in exile—and they also contain genuine prophecy. The last six chapters shift into apocalyptic, serving as an Old Testament prototype of Revelation, complete with angelic mediators, fantastic visions, symbolic numbers, and a theodicy that unveils God's final answer to the problem of evil. Taken together, Daniel is at once narrative, wisdom, prophetic, and apocalyptic.

Because Daniel moves from historical court tales to apocalyptic visions and shifts languages between Hebrew (Dan. 1, 8-12) and Aramaic (Dan 2-7), some scholars conclude that the book is a literary patchwork of two different compositions. But traditional scholars highlight the unity by pointing to the structure (this structure is proposed by Dr. Jim Hamilton):

- A *Exile to the unclean realm of the dead (ch. 1)*
- B *Four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God (ch. 2)*
- C *Deliverance of the faithful from the fiery furnace (ch. 3)*
- D *Humbling of proud King Nebuchadnezzar (ch. 4)*
- D' *Humbling of the proud King Belshazzar (ch. 5)*
- C' *Deliverance of the faithful from the lion's den (ch. 6)*
- B' *Four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God (ch. 7-9)*
- A' *Return from exile and resurrection from the dead (chs. 10-12)*

The book's symmetry tells a single, coherent story, pointing to intentional design rather than stitched-together sources. Daniel opens in despair and closes in hope, and the central pairing (D / D') drives home the book's core claim: God's kingdom prevails over the highest earthly thrones. The court stories in the first half model how faithful believers live under cultural pressure, while the apocalyptic visions in the second half unveil the cosmic reality behind those same pressures. Together, story and vision interpret each other as one unified witness to God's reign.

With the book's unity and purpose in view, Daniel 1 is not a throwaway prologue but the lens through which the rest of the book is meant to be read. Before we encounter beasts and empires, we meet teenagers at a table, pressured to let Babylon reshape their loves and loyalties. The opening chapter teaches us how to live faithfully inside the machinery of empire before it unveils how God will judge it. If we miss Daniel 1, we will misunderstand everything that follows.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

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.*

—"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah":

- Jehoiakim's character:
 - He "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chron. 36:5).
 - He was corrupt and exploitative: "Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness... who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing" (Jer. 22:13).
 - He rejected God's Word: "When Jehudi had read three or four columns [of Jeremiah's prophecy], the king cut them off with a knife and threw them into the fire" (36:24).

- He was a puppet king of Egypt: “Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king... and changed his name to Jehoiakim” (2 Kgs. 23:34).
 - His demise was dishonorable: ““He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:19).
 - Daniel 1 begins under Jehoiakim because exile did not fall on a faithful king—it fell on a defiant one who burned God’s Word and oppressed God’s people.
 - Scholars debate the accuracy of “the third year,” since Babylonian records describe these events as occurring in Jehoiakim’s fourth year and frame them not as a full “siege” but as military pressure or opposition. There are good explanations for this. First, Hebrew and Babylonian systems counted regnal years differently: the Jews used an accession-year system, while the Babylonians counted the partial first year as year one. Second, the word translated “besieged” can also mean “to come against” or “to lay pressure on,” which fits a preliminary campaign rather than the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.
 - Daniel 1:1 is not contradicting Babylonian records; it is describing the same campaign from a Hebrew chronological perspective, using language appropriate to an initial subjugation rather than the later fall of Jerusalem.
 - Daniel began his ministry in 605 BC. According to 1:21, he continued until the first year of Cyrus (539 BC). He lived and ministered in exile for over six decades.
- “Nebuchadnezzar... besieged it”:
- I have already addressed the translational flexibility of “besieged”, which can mean “to lay pressure on.” Jerusalem was not destroyed in Babylon’s initial opposition.
 - Nebuchadnezzar is one of the major characters of the Book of Daniel. At first, he opposes the one true God (Dan 2:5–12; 3:4–6), but he eventually expresses faith (2:47; 3:28–29; 4:34–37)—although his allegiance to Yahweh does appear shaky (Dan 3:1–6; 4:30). I don’t believe we can be certain about the king’s eternal status.
- “And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God”:
- This introduces a major theme of Daniel: God is sovereign over kings. Jehoiakim’s reign is not ended by Nebuchadnezzar so much as by the God who handed him over.
 - Along with the king, God handed the pagan king “some of the vessels of the house of God.” Which vessels?
 - The Hebrew word (kēlīm) is broad and is the same term used in Exodus for the sacred furnishings of the tabernacle (e.g., Exod 27:19; 30:27). In Daniel 5, these vessels clearly include cups used in temple worship, which shows the term can refer both to functional worship implements and drinking vessels that were consecrated for sacred use.
 - Jeremiah 52 tells us directly: “And the Chaldeans broke in pieces the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, and carried the bronze to Babylon. And they took away the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes for incense and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service; also the fire pans and the bowls. What was of gold, the captain of the guard took away as gold, and what was of silver, as silver” (Jer. 52:17-19).
 - Taking temple objects was standard practice in ancient imperialism. Conquering kings didn’t just seize land and people; they seized the defeated nation’s gods by carrying off sacred objects and installing them in their own temples. This was a public, theological claim: our gods defeated your gods. Babylon’s placement of Yahweh’s vessels in the temple of Marduk (Dan 1:2) fits this pattern. The Bible shows the same logic when the Philistines captured the ark and placed it in the temple of Dagon (1 Sam 5:1–2). In both cases, the victors meant to display divine supremacy—yet in both stories, God turns the tables. Dagon falls before the ark, and Babylon’s kings are progressively humbled before Yahweh (Dan 2; 4; 5).

- Daniel opens by showing how Babylon does what empires always do. They don't just subjugate; they claim supremacy over populations and their ideology. Daniel will spend the rest of the book showing how Yahweh will not yield his glory to another.
 - Why would God hand His own nation over to pagans? Because He keeps His Word:
 - Lev. 26: "27 **But if in spite of this you will not listen to me**, but walk contrary to me, 28 then I **will walk contrary to you** in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold [completely] for your sins... 31 And I will lay your **cities waste** and will make your **sanctuaries desolate**, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas... 33 **And I will scatter you among the nations...**34 "Then the land shall enjoy its **Sabbaths** as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its **Sabbaths**."
 - This matches just what happened. Babylon would ultimately decimate Jerusalem. In these verses, they have already taken items from the sanctuary.
 - The portion about Sabbaths is relevant based on 2 Chron. 36:21, which says the exile happened "to fulfill the word of the LORD... until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths."
 - Deut. 28: "If Israel disobeys, the covenant curses will befall them. They culminate with exile: "And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known" (28:64).
 - The pattern of disobedience/exile—and ultimate redemption—is the story arc of the Bible. Adam sinned and was exiled from Eden. The ultimate exile is death and hell.
 - Many characters in Scripture experience a microcosm of humanity's exile. Cain becomes "a restless wanderer on the earth" alienated from God's presence (Gen. 4:12, 16). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David each experience time away from the Promised Land—an "antitype" of the Garden of Eden—although some of them suffered unjustly. Even Jesus spends some time in Egypt. These personal exiles mirror the broader story of humanity's suffering and exile.
 - The Book of Daniel provides both the micro- and macro- perspectives on exile and redemption. He begins in Daniel 1 as a young exile, but the story ends with hope in resurrection—God's answer to the ultimate exile of death.
 - Exile is the human story, and resurrection is God's answer to it.
- "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 have already mentioned the ancient imperial pattern of stealing sacred objects and placing them in the house of one's god to declare supremacy.
 - "Shinar" reminds us of the Tower of Babel: "And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there" (Gen. 11:2).
 - "Shinar" is not just a geographical label; it's a theological one. Daniel has been carried away to the heart of human rebellion, false worship, and empire-building.
 - In the early chapters of Genesis, the whole world was God's temple. Eden was the "holy of holies," and Adam and Eve were entrusted to "work and keep" the Garden—two words used of Levitical priests in their temple service (Num. 3:7-8; 8:26). Gardens were viewed as an intersection of heaven and earth, meeting places of the gods—or in Israel's case, Yahweh. Upon exile, humans migrated east and launched their own project. They built a tower—a ziggurat—a supposed intersection of heaven and earth. God judged and scattered them, but the human impulse to build an anti-God empire has not yet died. One day, Daniel teaches, it will.

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.

—Empires are not just built on wealth but on human resources. Throughout history, they have imported their subjects to feed the machine.

—“royal family... nobility... youths without blemish... good appearance... wisdom... knowledge... learning... competent”:

- Nebuchadnezzar wanted the brightest and best to serve his empire. They needed to come from a royal or noble line—he didn't want riff-raff. He wanted young people because you can't teach an old dog new tricks. He wanted handsome men because empires honor superficial traits like beauty. And he wanted smart people because these men would serve as advisors.
- The Hebrew word for “youths” (Heb: *na'ar*) is not precise. In the OT, *na'ar* can refer to infants (**Moses**, Exod 2:6), young children (**Samuel**, 1 Sam 1:22), teenagers (**Joseph** at 17, Gen 37:2; **David** before Goliath, 1 Sam 17:33), and to young adults (**Solomon** at his accession, 1 Kgs 3:7; **Absalom's young warriors**, 2 Sam 18:5).
- Since Daniel remained in Babylon for about 66 years, he probably was not in his twenties. In my estimation, he was 14-16 years old: old enough to learn and present himself well and young enough that a his lifespan reaches about 80 years old.
- Young people: God uses you! “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

—“teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans”:

- Ancient societies were built on stories and myths passed down through generations. Daniel and his friends would learn all of them. This included sacred texts.
- “language”: Aramaic would soon become the lingua franca of the Babylonian and Persian empires, and Daniel 2–7 is written in that tongue. Jesus also spoke Aramaic in everyday life. At the time of Daniel, however, the Babylonians still used their own Akkadian language for administration and scholarship, written in cuneiform, even as Aramaic was rising as the common trade and diplomatic language.
- “Chaldeans”: Originally, this word just meant, “Babylonians,” but it gradually came to mean “magician” or “diviner.” Calling these men “Chaldeans” (rather than simply “Babylonians”) highlights the spiritual-intellectual elite of the empire—the astrologers, diviners, and magicians who claimed to interpret reality through pagan wisdom (Dan 2:2; 4:7; 5:7, 11). Daniel is therefore not merely trained for state service but immersed in a rival worldview that locates power in stars, omens, and ritual expertise rather than in Yahweh's revelation (Dan 1:4). Throughout the book, “the Chaldeans” function as representatives of Babylon's wisdom tradition, claiming insight into dreams and divine signs apart from Israel's God (Dan 2:10–11; 4:7; 5:7). Yet they are repeatedly exposed as powerless: they cannot tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream (Dan 2:27–28), nor interpret God's warnings in later crises (Dan 4:19; 5:25–28). The label thus sets up Daniel's central contrast—Babylon's wisdom versus God's wisdom—showing that Daniel can learn their texts without bowing to their theology.
- Goldingay (qtd. by House): “Babylonian wise men ‘were the guardians of the sacred traditional lore developed and preserved in Mesopotamia over centuries, covering natural history, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, myth, and chronicle.”
- Longman: “Daniel clearly would have been trained in the arts of divination through such means as interpreting unusual terrestrial and celestial phenomena, astrology, the examination of sheep livers, and so forth.”

—Many Bible scholars comment on Daniel's function within Israel's tradition of Wisdom Literature. The Book of Daniel does not fit the mold of proverbial wisdom like Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, which fit squarely within the Wisdom genre. Daniel is narrative, prophetic, and apocalyptic, while nevertheless participating functionally inside of Israel's Wisdom Tradition. Rather than offering proverbs, Daniel enacts wisdom under pressure.

—Consider the theme of wisdom in the Book of Daniel:

- Daniel 1:4 — "...youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all **wisdom**, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning..."
- Daniel 1:17 — "God gave them learning and skill in all literature and **wisdom**..."
- Daniel 2:20 — "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong **wisdom** and might."
- Daniel 2:21 — "He gives **wisdom** to the **wise** and knowledge to those who have understanding."
- Daniel 2:23 — "You have given me **wisdom** and might..."
- Daniel 2:48 — "...made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the **wise** men of Babylon."
- Daniel 5:11 — "...light and understanding and **wisdom**, like the **wisdom** of the gods, were found in him."
- Daniel 12:3 — "And those who are **wise** shall shine like the brightness of the sky above..."
- Daniel 12:10 — "...none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are **wise** shall understand."

—Daniel models "the wise" who understand the times in which they live, who will "shine" like stars in the resurrection. Daniel 12 shows how his example will be multiplied in the lives of faithful believers in the last days—the era between Christ's resurrection and ours.

—In these last days, we must ask God for wisdom. Modern empires crush the saints, and their cultures corrupt. Only "the wise" endure. And only God gives the wisdom we need.

—The book that begins with wisdom for life in exile ends with wisdom for life unto resurrection.

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.

—The Babylonians gave them different food, different drink, different education, and different names. This was more than enculturation—it was identity reformation. Israel's captors knew: If they can reshape their sense of self, they can expect allegiance.

—Daniel and his friends resisted, but only partially. They accepted the education, which included sacred Babylonian books and rituals. They accepted different names, which identified them directly with Babylonian gods. But they resisted the food.

—This is striking. If anything was to be rejected, would it not have been the names and education? These most directly associated them with Babylonian gods!

- Education: It's possible to be trained by false-religion gurus without bowing to their gods. The story later reveals their refusal to worship idols.
- Names: They really didn't have power to resist this. The Babylonians would call them whatever they wanted. A more secular version of this was Holocaust victims identified not by name, but by a Nazi-assigned number. The intent of this act was to erase identity and replace it with the state's story. Daniel may accept the imposed name, but he never accepts the imposed worship. Daniel and his friends draw their line where obedience is possible without grandstanding. Faithfulness here is quiet, embodied, and repeatable.
- Food: The exiles had the most power over this because it's hard for captors to force food down your throat. Furthermore, the subsequent test reveals that eating was the least public act. Education and being addressed by a name happened publicly, but Daniel and his friends were able to eat food without public notice.
- Application: Their wisdom exposes how complex it is to "live in the world but not of it." Some Christians draw hard lines around public education; others don't. Some refuse certain media; others are less restrained. Daniel doesn't give us a single rule for every cultural pressure. He gives us a posture: submit where you must, resist where you can—and don't make a show of it.

—But what about the king's food and wine required resistance?

- All we know is that Daniel felt the food and drink would “defile” him. This language draws from the same Levitical purity categories found in Leviticus 11: *“43 You shall not **make yourselves detestable** with any swarming thing that swarms, and you shall not **defile** yourselves with them, and become unclean through them. 44 For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not **defile** yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground.”*
- The Hebrew word for “defile” is technically different in Leviticus 11, but it matches categorically with what we see in Daniel 1.
- Daniel felt that the king’s food would render him ritually unclean for the worship of Yahweh. It would contradict God’s holiness, His “cleanness.”
- Scholars debate how this could be, since the Law did not forbid wine. Daniel’s proposed test in verse 12—that he only consumes vegetables and water—is nowhere required by the Old Testament.
- In my mind, Daniel’s proposed test was rooted in simplicity. Requiring the chief eunuch to perfectly serve him a kosher diet would have been too much to ask. Water and vegetables were safe because they were always allowed in the Law.
- As for the wine, perhaps Daniel had made a vow not to drink any.
- Some scholars postulate that Daniel refused the food and drink of the king because they would have been sacrificed to idols. I am not convinced by this because the Old Testament never outright forbids eating food sacrificed to idols. This development came later in rabbinic teaching, and it was debated in the NT church. The clear line, when it comes to idol-food, is that you can’t eat in such a way that it participates in pagan worship (Ex. 34:15). Since Daniel took his meals outside of the public purview (he was later able to hide his diet), it is unlikely that these meals would have participated in pagan worship.
- Others say he resisted the king’s food to show that Yahweh sustained him, not Babylon’s king. But the stated concern was religious—defilement. Eating and drinking what a pagan provides does not inherently defile. Nehemiah drank the king’s wine as a professional cupbearer (poison-tester)!
- This brings me back to my original conclusion: Daniel resisted the king’s food because it would have rendered him ritually unclean under the Law. He proposed water and vegetables as a simple, workable way to remain faithful without demanding insane levels of special treatment. It’s not impossible that idolatrous associations formed part of the background, but I am not convinced because water and vegetables could also have been offered to the gods, and OT does not issue a blanket ban on eating food once sacrificed to idols so long as one is not participating in pagan worship (cf. Exod 34:15).
- Even if it is difficult to pinpoint his rationale, the main point is that living in a pagan culture requires a balance of resistance and accommodation. It’s unrealistic to reject an entire culture while living inside it. Yet it’s godless to fully cower it. Christians will likely draw lines in different places. Romans 14 counsels grace for differing convictions on debated matters.

—Detail on their names:

- Daniel, called Belteshazzar: Daniel means “God is my judge”; Belteshazzar means “May Bel protect his life.” Bel is the title of Babylon’s chief god, Marduk, and it means “lord.”
- Hananiah, called Shadrach: Hananiah means “Yahweh is gracious”; Shadrach likely means “command of Aku (the moon god).”
- Mishael, called Mesach: Mishael means “Who is like God?”; Meshach likely means “Who is like Aku?”
- Azariah, called Abednego: Azariah means “Yahweh has helped”; Abednego means “servant of Nabu.” Nabu (Nebo/Nebu) is Marduk’s son, the god of wisdom, writing, and destiny. He was believed to record the fates of people and kings.
- Babylon doesn’t just rename them; it theologizes their identities, replacing Yahweh’s name with Babylonian gods.

9 And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see."

—"God gave Daniel favor and compassion":

- In verse 2, "the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah" into Nebuchadnezzar's hand.
- In verse 9, "God gave Daniel favor and compassion".
- Later, in verse 17, "God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom..."
- This language subtly reinforces one of the major themes of Daniel—that God is sovereign, and He gives (and takes) as He pleases. He gives Israel into judgment while He simultaneously gives favor, compassion, learning, and skill to these exiles.
- These two ideas—"favor and compassion" (Heb: *ḥēn* and *raḥāmîm* / *raḥûm*)—belong to the vocabulary of God's covenant character. Scripture regularly pairs grace/favor and mercy/compassion in covenant formulas. (While *ḥēn* (favor) is related in sense to *ḥannûn* (gracious), they are distinct words that belong to the same grace-lexicon.)
 - Ex. 34:6: "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God **merciful and gracious** (*raḥûm* / *ḥannûn*), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..."
 - Psalm 103:8 — "The LORD is **merciful and gracious** (*raḥûm* / *ḥannûn*), slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."
 - Psalm 111:4 — "The LORD is **gracious and merciful** (*ḥannûn* / *raḥûm*)."
 - Nehemiah 9:17 — "You are a God ready to forgive, **gracious and merciful** (*ḥannûn* / *raḥûm*), slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love..."
 - Joel 2:13 — "Return to the LORD your God, for he is **gracious and merciful** (*ḥannûn* / *raḥûm*), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love..."
- Daniel 1:9 echoes the covenant formula of Yahweh as "gracious and merciful" (Exod 34:6; Ps 103:8), showing that God's covenant heart toward Israel continues even in exile. The same covenant that yielded the curse of exile gained the favor of Babylon.
- There is debate in Christian theology about whether God has a future purpose for ethnic Israel. Some argue the church has replaced Israel; others treat the church as a temporary "parenthesis" before God returns to an Israel-centered plan. Verses like Daniel 1:9 don't settle that debate, but they do reveal God's covenant faithfulness to Israel even under judgment. Even when Israel is covenantally cursed, God still shows covenant favor. Salvation comes only through faith in Jesus, and elsewhere in Scripture I believe we're given reason to expect a Jewish Great Awakening before Christ returns (Rom 11). Daniel 1:9 reminds us that exile is not abandonment.
- Daniel 1 quietly repeats a single drumbeat: God gives. Nebuchadnezzar "came," "besieged," renamed, trained, and fed—but the narrator keeps slipping in the real actor behind the scenes: "the Lord gave Jehoiakim..." (v. 2), "God gave Daniel favor and compassion..." (v. 9), and "God gave them learning and skill..." (v. 17). Babylon can manage bodies, schedules, and titles, but it cannot control outcomes. Even in exile, God is not reacting to empire; He is ruling over it. Daniel 1's first lesson, then, is not resistance but confidence: the God who "gives" is the God who governs.

—"chief of the eunuchs": Eunuchs were entrusted by kings with high-level responsibility. They were often castrated at a young age to prevent them from sleeping with the king's wives or concubines—a move to usurp the throne. Many believe that Daniel and his friends were made eunuchs. This is possible, but the text remains silent about it.

—Daniel proposed a test rather than issuing an ultimatum. He holds his conviction firmly, but practices it humbly—entrusting both the outcome and the official's response to God rather than coercing compliance.

—Daniel models faithful resistance that is firm in conviction yet wise in practice. He doesn't grandstand. He doesn't act like a martyr. He quietly entrusts the outcome to God.

—On matters of personal formation (like food and drink in Daniel 1), faithfulness can be quiet, negotiated, and discreet because the command is applied personally and the public consequences are limited. But when obedience is publicly commanded to be violated (like worshiping the statue in Daniel 3), silence becomes complicity. Faithfulness must then be visible, costly, and non-negotiable. Wisdom discerns how to obey in unique situations.

—In everyday life, this might look like quietly setting personal limits around media, money, or workplace habits without turning your choices into a public statement. But when you're asked to lie at work, publicly affirm something you believe is false, or take part in a symbolic act that contradicts your allegiance to Christ, faithfulness can't stay private—silence would signal agreement. Wisdom is knowing when to practice discreet resistance and when to accept visible cost.

—“ten days”:

- Dr. Jim Hamilton says that the ten-day test in Daniel is alluded to in Revelation 2:10, where Jesus says, “for ten days you will have tribulation”, and then promises rewards to those who overcome. He says, “The church in Smyrna was probably faced with more than ten literal days of testing, making it probably that the reference is to a stylized period meant to recall Daniel... Daniel was written such that the historical experience of Daniel serves as a kind of exemplar, showing Daniel's audience how they should respond to the persecutions predicted in the apocalyptic sections of the book of Daniel.”
- The book of Revelation alludes to the OT over 500 times in 400 verses, showing how the entire Scripture is fulfilled in the last days. Like Daniel—and the church in Smyrna—we will suffer tests from cultural pressures. But suffering leads to exaltation if we heed God's wisdom.

—“vegetables... and water”: See commentary in prior verses about defiling food.

14 So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. 16 So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

—Daniel suggested the ten-day test, but all his friends participated. He appears as a leader of the group.

—The eunuch's concern had been that they would end up in a “worse condition than the youths who are of your own age” (v. 10). God came through for the exiles—not only did they appear “not worse” but “better” and “fatter” than the rest!

17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. 20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. 21 And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

—The Babylonians schooled them in “literature” (v. 4), but God gave them “learning and skill” to understand it, as well as “wisdom” to apply it.

—A worldly education can be valuable if we apply it with God's wisdom.

—God also gave Daniel “understanding in all visions and dreams”. The Babylonians would have trained the young men in their principles of interpretation, but Scripture gives God the credit for his skill in this area. This sets us up for his interpretations in later chapters.

—Because their wisdom came from God, these four men were “ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters” in Babylon. They passed their ten-day test; now they operate in wisdom that is ten-times superior. The matching phraseology subtly suggests that God is rewarding their obedience. Suffering leads to exaltation—if we suffer faithfully.

—The “magicians and enchanters” worshiped Babylonian gods. They were not faithful to Yahweh—and it showed. God's superiority is discerned by the wisdom He gives His people.

—To be superior to Babylonian sorcerers was no small thing. These were not viewed in the ancient world as Junior Varsity magicians but as the empire's elite scientific-religious guilds—trained court scholars renowned across the ancient world for astrology, omen-reading, ritual healing, and dream interpretation. When Daniel outshines them, the point isn't that God beats amateurs, but that Yahweh's revelation overwhelms the most sophisticated wisdom system of the age.

—Daniel 1 doesn't just introduce characters; it teaches the reader how to interpret the terrifying apocalyptic material that comes later. Before the beasts appear in Daniel 7–12, the book shows you what "beastly" empire looks like in everyday form—assimilation, pressure, identity reformation—and then it shows you what God does with it: He gives favor, wisdom, and vindication to faithful exiles. That means when the visions later unveil monstrous kingdoms, the reader already knows that empires rage, but they do so on a leash, and God sustains His people inside them. The point of the visions is not to produce panic, but to deepen our confidence in the Most High God who rules the kingdom of man.

—"until the first year of Cyrus":

- Daniel lived in exile from his youth to his death. He longed to return home (Dan. 9), but God never gave him what he wanted most. Experiencing God's favor on our lives does not mean we get everything we want.
- Daniel remained in power beyond Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. Goldingay observes this as a subtle note of triumph: Daniel "outlasts" his conquerors.