

Faith Under Empire: A Study of Daniel

Daniel 1 - "Faithfulness Begins Before the Crisis"

Introduction:

"Whose Story Will Write Your Identity?"

A passport. "What does a passport tell the world about you?"

- where you belong
- whose citizen you are
- which nation claims you

"Can someone take your passport away?" Yes.

"Can they change your citizenship simply by giving you another document?" No.

"When Daniel arrived in Babylon, everything about him changed overnight."

- His home changed.
- His language changed.
- His education changed.
- His daily routine changed.
- Even his name changed.

But one thing never changed.

His true citizenship.

Babylon could issue Daniel a Babylonian name.

Babylon could never issue Daniel a Babylonian heart.

That is exactly where chapter one begins.



Major Themes

God Rules History

Even defeat serves His purposes.

Holiness Is Possible in Exile

Faithfulness does not require isolation.

Identity Determines Conduct

Daniel settled who he was before deciding what he would do.

God Honors Faithfulness

Not always immediately.

But always ultimately.

Practical Applications

For Israel

Exile is not abandonment.

For Christians

Culture can influence us without defining us.

For the Church

Our greatest battles are usually over identity before they become battles over doctrine or behavior.

Theme of Daniel - "God rules history—even when His people live under hostile governments—and He will establish His eternal kingdom through the Messiah."

"Faithfulness in a Foreign Culture"



I. Historical Background

- Date: 605 B.C. – First deportation under Nebuchadnezzar II.
- Judah under judgment (2 Kings 24).
- Babylon = dominant world empire.
- Daniel likely 15–18 years old.

- Temple vessels taken → symbolic of YHWH's defeat (in Babylonian eyes).

Theological Frame:

Daniel 1:2 – “The Lord gave...” → God is sovereign even in exile.



II. Outline:

1. God Gave (1:1–2)

- Divine passive: Babylon didn't win—God permitted.
- Law of Moses allusion: Deut 28 (covenant curses).
- Discussion: How does recognizing God's sovereignty change how we view national crises?
- Application: God may discipline but never abandons.

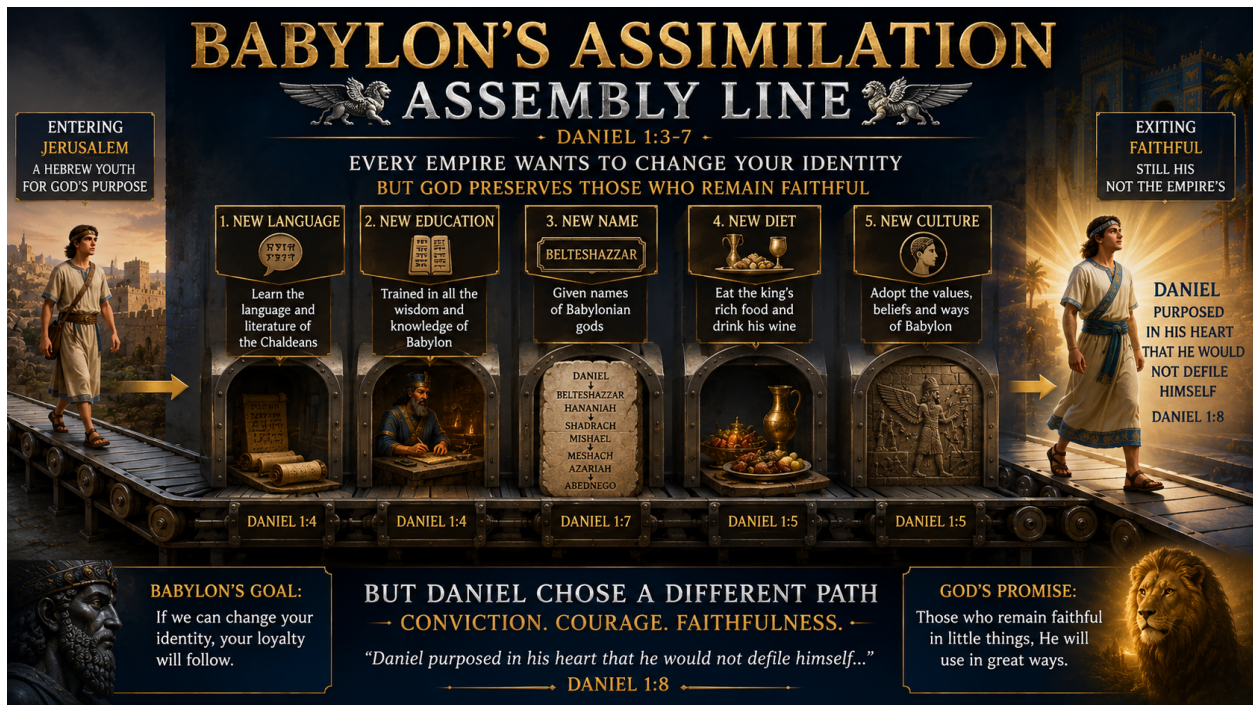


2. Reprogramming Identity (1:3–7)

- New names invoking Babylonian gods.
- Strategy: education, diet, indoctrination.
- Figure of Speech: **Metonymy** – “tongue of the Chaldeans” = literature/culture.
- Application: The world still renames values.

Discussion: What “name changes” does modern culture try to impose on

Christians?



3. Refusal to Defile (1:8–16)

- Likely violation of Lev 11 (unclean foods).
- Hebrew word “defile” = ritual pollution.



- Daniel resolves internally first.
- NT echo: Paul the Apostle (Rom 12:2 – not conformed).
Discussion: Where must conviction begin before behavior changes?
Application: Holiness begins in quiet decisions.

4. God Gave Again (1:17–21)

- Wisdom “ten times better.”
- Contrast motif: divine wisdom vs pagan learning.
- Revelation parallel: faithful under empire (Rev 2–3).
Discussion: Does faithfulness guarantee worldly promotion?
Application: Even if not promoted, we serve under God’s eye.

Theology

Notice the repeated expression:

God gave

1:2 - God gave Judah into Babylon's hand.

1:9 - God gave Daniel favor.

1:17 - God gave wisdom.

The king appears powerful.

God is actually directing history.

This becomes one of the dominant themes of the book.

What Should Nebuchadnezzar Have Learned?

1. Israel's God controls history.
Babylon conquered because God allowed it.
Nebuchadnezzar is an instrument—not the author—of history.
2. God's servants cannot simply be reprogrammed.
Names can change.
Hearts cannot.
3. Wisdom comes from Israel's God.
Babylon possessed universities.
Daniel possessed revelation.
The king's "wise men" will repeatedly fail.
Daniel repeatedly succeeds.

What Should Daniel and the Other Exiles Learn?

God has not abandoned us.
Exile fulfills covenant warnings.
God remains present outside Jerusalem.
Holiness does not require political independence.
They can serve pagan kings without serving pagan gods.

What Should Later Jewish Readers Learn?

God has preserved faithful Jews before.
Remain faithful.
Empires rise.
Empires fall.
God remains.

This would encourage Jews living under Persian, Greek, and Roman domination.

Connections with Jeremiah

Jeremiah predicted Babylon. Jeremiah 21
Nebuchadnezzar is God's servant. Jeremiah 25
Seventy-year captivity. Jeremiah 29
Build houses.
Seek Babylon's welfare.
Remain faithful while living there.
Daniel is living Jeremiah 29.

Connections with Ezekiel

Ezekiel was deported in 597 BC.
Daniel in 605 BC.
Ezekiel repeatedly emphasizes
God's glory is not confined to Jerusalem.
The glory departs the Temple (Ezekiel 10).
God accompanies His people into exile.
Daniel demonstrates that truth.

Interestingly, Ezekiel 14:14 mentions Daniel alongside Noah and Job as examples of righteousness.

Law of Moses Connections

The exile fulfills Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28
The food issue recalls Leviticus 11

Whether the concern is ceremonial uncleanness, food associated with idols, or both, Daniel refuses to violate covenant holiness.



New Testament Connections

Although Daniel 1 is not quoted directly very often, its themes permeate the New Testament.

Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed..."

Daniel refuses conformity.

Philippians 2:15 "Shine as lights..."

Daniel literally shines in Babylon.

1 Peter

Christians are "sojourners and pilgrims."

Peter's language mirrors exile theology.

The Church lives in Babylon.

Hebrews 11

Daniel belongs among those who lived by faith.

DANIEL AND REVELATION ONE STORY – TWO PERSPECTIVES – ONE KINGDOM				
DANIEL God's Sovereignty in History The rise and fall of earthly kingdoms		COMPARED	REVELATION God's Victory in History The triumph of God's eternal Kingdom	
	Focus God deals with the kingdoms of men. (Daniel 2:21)	→ FOCUS ←	God deals with the kingdom of Satan, the world, and His enemies. (Revelation 20:10)	
	Timeline From Babylon to the rise of Rome. (Daniel 2:31–40; 7:1–7)	→ TIMEFRAME ←	From the rise of Rome to the return of Christ. (Revelation 17–19)	
	Key Theme God sets up His Kingdom that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 2:44)	→ KEY THEME ←	God's Kingdom is revealed, opposes evil, and is victorious. (Revelation 11:15)	
	Perspective Seen through visions given to Daniel. (Daniel 7:15–16)	→ PERSPECTIVE ←	Seen through visions given to John, a fellow servant of Jesus. (Revelation 1:1–2)	
	Language Hebrew and Aramaic. Written primarily for God's people.	→ LANGUAGE & AUDIENCE ←	Greek. Written for the church—God's people living under Roman rule.	
	Call to God's People Be faithful under empire. God is in control. (Daniel 1:8; 6:10; 6:26)	→ CALL TO GOD'S PEOPLE ←	Be faithful to Jesus. The church will overcome. Jesus is coming soon! (Revelation 2:10; 12:11; 22:20)	
	Ultimate Declaration "The Most High rules the kingdom of men." (Daniel 4:17, 25, 32)	→ ULTIMATE DECLARATION ←	"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)	
DANIEL TELLS US THAT GOD WILL SET UP AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM. REVELATION SHOWS US THAT KINGDOM VICTORIOUS ON EARTH.		 JESUS IS THE KING. THE CHURCH IS HIS KINGDOM. → AND THE VICTORY IS CERTAIN! ←		
"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." 1 Corinthians 4:20				
		 JESUS BUILDS HIS CHURCH Matthew 16:18-19 His Kingdom is now on earth through His people, empowered by His Spirit.		

Revelation

Perhaps the strongest connection.

Babylon becomes the symbolic name for Rome.

John expects Christians to do exactly what Daniel did:

live faithfully under empire.

Daniel is the model citizen of Revelation.

Discussion Questions

Why does Daniel begin with God's defeat before God's victories?

Can believers fully participate in secular culture without losing their identity?

Where does compromise usually begin?

Why is "purposing in your heart" more important than merely reacting well?

What modern forms of assimilation challenge Christians today?

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Application

Our culture also attempts to rename us.

It seeks to redefine

truth

identity

morality

worship

Like Daniel, Christians do not withdraw from society. Neither do they surrender to it.

They serve faithfully within their culture while belonging to another kingdom.

As Paul writes in Letter to the Philippians 3:20, "our citizenship is in heaven."

Closing Theme

Babylon could change Daniel's address, education, language, and name—but it could not change his heart.