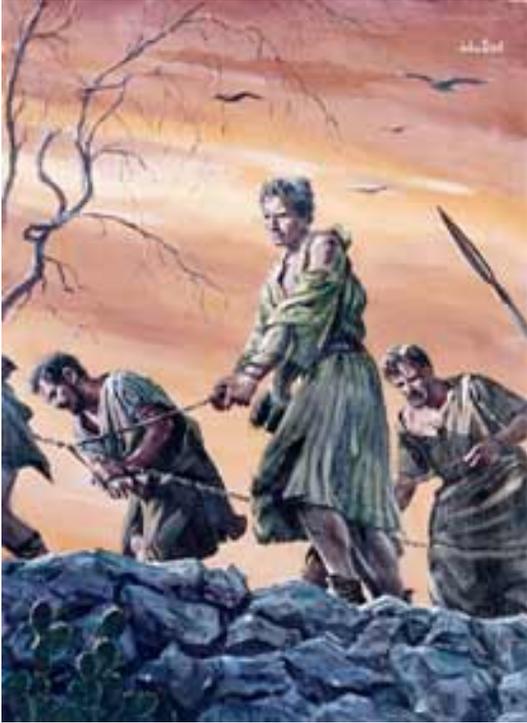


FOCUS ON DANIEL - LESSON 1

Bad Happens But God Provides Daniel 1 and 2



The wind-whipped sand stung his face like a hundred needles pricking at his skin. Daniel paused and wiped the gritty sweat from his forehead. The past six weeks seemed a long blur of sandals crunching on sand, a harsh sun beating down on his raw, sun-burned beet-red neck, and eyes squinting through stinging perspiration and the shimmering heat. They kept saying Babylon was just ahead. He hoped so; he wanted this nightmare to end.

During more than one cold desert night, as he lay wrapped in his dusty blanket under the

star-swept sky, he must have jolted awake, shaking with fear, imagining what Nebuchadnezzar might do to his friends and family. In a few short months horrifying scenes would occur.

King Nebuchadnezzar's vast Babylonian army would sweep into Judah. Soldiers would lay siege to Jerusalem. The Hebrews would succumb to gnawing hunger, fear, and despair. Battering rams would slam against the city gates. Wave after wave of soldiers would pour into the city after they crushed the main gate into splinters. The terrible screams of friends and families of the captives would be heard and their bodies sprawled along Jerusalem's streets.

These images haunted Daniel as he marched along with other captive Israelites on their way into exile. Every morning as the roosters crowed in

neighboring villages, buglers roused their Babylonian escort. Daniel would have to struggle to his feet, shove his feet into worn, dew-covered sandals, and prepare for another fifteen-mile desert trek, knowing there would be many more. It was a one-thousand-mile journey to Babylon.

Above all the thoughts running through Daniel's mind, must have been the question—why? Why this tragedy? What had he done to deserve it? What possible purpose could God have in Israel's utter humiliation? Back home in Judah, Daniel had belonged to a loving family who gave him the best life had to offer. He faced a bright future as one of Jerusalem's elite. Now he had nothing. The future seemed dark. Would he ever again see his country, his home, his mother and father? Would he spend his days as a slave to a treacherous king in a foreign country?

Read [Daniel chapter 1](#) before proceeding.

1. The two countries involved in the war in which Daniel was taken captive were: ([Daniel 1:1, 2.](#))

- Judah and Greece.
- Judah and Babylon.
- Judah and Rome.

2. Why were Daniel and his friends taken captive? ([Daniel 1:3, 4.](#))

- They were able to pay a large ransom.
- They were carrying out armed raids against the enemy.
- They were filled with wisdom and knowledge, physically unblemished, teachable, and able to serve their new master.

Daniel and three close friends were assigned to Nebuchadnezzar's royal college to be trained for key positions in the Babylonian Empire. The young men were also given the rare privilege of eating food from the king's menu, prepared in the king's kitchen. For three years they would receive instruction from the best scholars in the land in order to serve their new king. If Daniel had to be a slave, at least his life would be better than those of the captive Hebrews sweating in the fields or at construction projects.

3. The names of Daniel's three friends who were taken captive with him were: (Daniel 1:6.)

- Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
- Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Azariah.
- Isaiah, Haggai, and Azariah.

4. What new names were Daniel and his friends given in Babylon? (Daniel 1:7.)

- Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Hosea.
- Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Obadiah, and Hosea.

The names of Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were based on the names of Babylonian gods. King Nebuchadnezzar was attempting to get the three young men to forget their religious heritage and become loyal servants in the Babylonian system. It was easy to suppose that if they were given "the royal treatment," the king would soon have their hearts and minds; he would soon have some of the best minds in the world!

Daniel soon discovered, to his dismay, that the food on the royal menu was unhealthy and contrary to the guidelines given in Scripture.

5. What decision did Daniel make regarding King Nebuchadnezzar's commands? (Daniel 1:8.)

- He would not defile himself by eating or drinking the king's food or wine.
- He would eat the food and wine the king provided even though it had been offered to heathen idols.
- He would ask God's blessing on the king's food and wine before eating it.

Most teenagers find it very embarrassing to be different. Most adults are not too fond of sticking out in a crowd either. But Daniel and his three friends "determined," "purposed," or "decided" something. They made a decision to follow God unconditionally. Daniel believed that God would honor his decision to be faithful. That was an important step in his life, as we shall see. When we respond to what is right, the Holy Spirit guides us in our choice, and He also gives us the power to carry out that decision. '

6. What did Daniel request of Melzar, the head steward? (Daniel 1:12, 13.)

- He asked for an audience with King Nebuchadnezzar to explain why he could not eat the food and wine provided.
- He asked Melzar not to offer the food to idols before giving it to him to eat.
- He asked for a ten-day test during which he and his friends would eat only healthful food and drink water.

7. What were the physical results of the ten-day test? (Daniel 1:15.)

- Daniel and his friends looked more healthy and gained weight.
- Daniel and his friends got sick and decided it was better to eat the king's food after all.
- Daniel and his friends didn't look any different, but they felt better.

8. What were the mental results of the ten-day test? (Daniel 1:17.)

- Their memory wasn't as good as it had been; they kept forgetting important information.
- Their mental abilities were unaffected by the ten-day test.
- They had superior knowledge and skill in wisdom and literature.

9. What special ability did Daniel have? (Daniel 1:17.)

- An amazing ability to solve complicated mathematical problems.
- The ability to understand visions and dreams.
- He was able to memorize long lists of information and remember them for years.

10. What were the political results of the ten-day test? (Daniel 1:19, 20.)

- Daniel and his friends were appointed to serve the king because they proved to be ten times superior to all the other young men being considered for a position in Nebuchadnezzar's government.
- Daniel and his friends scored significantly higher than all the others on the examination, but they were exiled back home to Judah because they refused to eat the king's food that had been offered to idols.
- Daniel and his friends didn't score as well as some others being considered for position in the government, so they were assigned to study for another year before they could take the examination again.



William Wilberforce was facing his biggest decision since being elected to England's Parliament in 1780. He'd just read a clergyman's impassioned account of the horrors of the slave trade. What was he going to do about it? Everything in his upper-class life of privilege might have led him to ignore this unpleasant problem that was enriching the British Empire. But Wilberforce had made a commitment to Christ and wanted to live out the principles of the Bible.

So he decided to take a stand. He

began pouring out his powerful oratory on behalf of the black men, women, and children who were bleeding, starving, and suffocating to death in the holds of British ships. The opposition marshaled its forces. Many powerful people rose to attack Wilberforce and his position. They warned that two-thirds of England's commerce would disappear if the slave trade were abolished. And their voices carried the day.

But Wilberforce wouldn't give up. He distributed thousands of pamphlets, spoke at public meetings, circulated petitions, and organized a boycott of slave-grown sugar. He kept bringing up the slave question for a vote year after year in parliament. He kept on fighting, encouraged by a note from John Wesley, which he kept in his Bible: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils, but if God be for you who can be against you?"

Finally, after years of frustration, a bill banning the slave trade passed on February 4, 1807. Wilberforce had helped to change history. He'd made a difference in the world by sticking to what he knew was right. He'd won

against the overwhelming forces of self-interest. William Wilberforce felt wonderfully blessed by God.

Like Wilberforce, Daniel experienced the joy of seeing how faithfulness to God brings blessings. When you choose to follow God no matter the cost, He will honor your faithfulness! There may be difficult times. Daniel faced difficulties. There may be heartache, pain, and suffering. Daniel experienced those. But if we keep our eyes and hearts focused on God, He will turn our darkness into light and our pain into joy!

This first chapter in Daniel sets the stage for the entire book. In fact, it also sets the stage for the book of Revelation. These two prophetic books are inseparably linked. Both give us a big picture of the struggle between good and evil, the conflict between God and Satan, from the beginning of sin until the eradication of sin. The curtain rises on this great controversy in the chapter just studied.

In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, led a ruthless attack against Jerusalem. These two cities represent two ideologies. Babylon, with its occult practices and pagan gods, represents a counterfeit system of worship, rebellion against God, and apostasy. Jerusalem, the city of Daniel, represents faithfulness, obedience, and loyalty to God. This contrast between Babylon and God's people is repeated in various ways throughout the books of Daniel and Revelation.

§ § §

It was nearly midnight when sixteen-year-old Adolf Hitler and his friend, Gustl Kubizek, stepped out of the opera house in Linz, an Austrian city on the Danube River. They had just watched a performance of Richard Wagner's *Rienzi*, the fairy tale of a poor boy in ancient Rome who became the ruler of a vast empire.

The two young men walked silently through the cobbled streets until they reached the countryside. Adolf then led the way up a hill. At the summit they looked down on Linz glimmering in the moonlight.

Adolf seized the hands of his friend and, staring into his face, said excitedly, "Something important has happened to me tonight, Gustl. As I watched the story of Rienzi unfold, I seemed to be seeing my future. I, too, am a poor boy like Rienzi. I, too, will rise to become the ruler of a great empire. You will hear much about me in the future, my friend."

The two then walked down the hill to separate destinies. Hitler and his friend met again thirty years later, "Remember that moonlit night on the Feinberg?" Adolf asked. Gustl nodded. "In that hour it began," Hitler said.

Hitler probably never studied the prophecy of Daniel 2. If he had, he might have realized that his obsession with world dominance could never become a reality. That's because God had said so!



Sometime after Daniel's arrival in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which troubled him very deeply. He was haunted by it. And yet he couldn't quite remember the details. What exactly had he seen that so disturbed him?

Nebuchadnezzar summoned his "wise men." These individuals had been trained in astrology and prophetic readings and interpretations; they knew the rituals that were supposed to keep

the gods happy. They believed that every event in a person's life—even the most trivial—was determined by some natural force such as the position of a

star. They saw omens in the livers of sheep, the path of birds in flight, and the shapes of oil on water. Their theory was that, by understanding and responding to these forces, they could solve problems, reverse failures, and guarantee success in life.

But these wise men came up short when it came to telling Nebuchadnezzar what he'd dreamed. They could come up with an interpretation quickly enough. But to get inside a man's head—that was impossible. So the king ordered them all executed. News of this reached Daniel, and he went to Nebuchadnezzar, requesting a delay in the death sentence. Granted some time, Daniel hurried home and gathered his friends for a prayer session. That night God revealed to Daniel exactly what the king had dreamed—and also exactly what the dream meant.

In the king's throne room the next morning, a court official named Arioch wanted to claim full credit for discovering "a man of the captives" who could unravel Nebuchadnezzar's secret. But Daniel gave full credit to God: "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28). Daniel wanted the king to know that the God of heaven was revealing to him events that would take place at the end of Earth's history—that is, the "latter days."

God answered the earnest prayers of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in a dramatic way. He was concerned about their predicament.

God has the same concern for you today. Your needs, whatever they are, matter to God. He doesn't regard them as a small thing. When you weep over the loss of a parent or friend, God sheds tears, too. When you feel backed against a wall because you lost a job or can't come up with the money for this month's bills, God feels your distress. When loneliness burns deep into your soul, God wants to fill that void. He longs to show how much He cares about you.

The things God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel are really yet another way of showing that He cares. We can look over Daniel's shoulder and see a spectacular picture of history. God wants us to know where history is heading. He wants us to feel confident and secure about the future. Let's look at the details of Nebuchadnezzar's extraordinary dream in Daniel 2:31-35.

11. What did King Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream? (Daniel 2:31-35.)

- A ferocious animal with great, sharp teeth.
- A violent storm that destroyed one-third of the earth.
- A great statue or image made of different metals.

Options for 12—16:

- Bronze/Brass.
- Gold.
- Iron
- Iron mixed with clay
- Silver.

12. In the metal image that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, of what metal was the head made? (Daniel 2:32.)

13. Of what metal were the chest and arms made? (Daniel 2:32.)

14. Of what metal were the belly and thighs made? (Daniel 2:32.)

15. Of what metal were the legs made? (Daniel 2:33.)

16. Of what metal were the feet and toes made? (Daniel 2:33.)

Picture King Nebuchadnezzar as he leans forward on his throne, gazing intently at the remarkable young man standing before him. Daniel reveals exactly what the king saw in his dream. Nebuchadnezzar almost leaps from his throne. Yes, that's it! A huge metallic man. It stood over him as he slept!

As Daniel continues, the king gets even more excited. This Hebrew is getting everything right, down to the minutest detail. Not a single mistake. His God must be some god! But Nebuchadnezzar still has one big question, "What does it mean?"

He doesn't have to wait long for an answer. Daniel continues, "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king" (vs. 36). Daniel proceeds to show the king how each metal, each part of the statue, corresponds to an empire in history. He traces the history of nations, starting with Babylon, all the way to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Head of Gold

17. In the metal image that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, what did the head of gold represent? (Daniel 2:37, 38.)

- The future empire of Rome.
- Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom of Babylon.
- The United States.



Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom of Babylon ruled the world **from 605 to 539 B.C.** It was centered in the area occupied by modern-day Iraq, a distance from Baghdad. The Babylonians worshiped one god more than any other, Bel-Marduk, made out of solid gold. Nebuchadnezzar was surely pleased that the gold of his Babylonian Empire was represented by the statue's head. But Babylon would not last forever.

Chest and Arms of Silver

18. What did Daniel say would arise following the kingdom of Babylon? (Daniel 2:39)

- Another kingdom that would be even stronger than Babylon.
- Another kingdom that would last longer than Babylon had lasted.
- Another kingdom that would be inferior to Babylon.



In fulfillment of God's prediction, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom crumbled into ruins when Cyrus, the Persian general, overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C. Interestingly enough, 150 years before this happened, the prophet Isaiah predicted that a man named Cyrus would be the one to overthrow Babylon (Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1).

Later in his book, Daniel named the two kingdoms that would succeed Babylon: Medo-Persia and Greece (Daniel 8:20, 21). The Medes and Persians ruled the world **from 539 to 331 B.C.**

Belly and Thighs of Bronze

19. In the image, what did the belly and thighs of bronze represent? (Daniel 2:39.)

- A third world-ruling kingdom.
- The last king of Babylon.
- The first emperor of Rome.



The belly and thighs of bronze represent the kingdom of Greece, which defeated the Persians at the Battle of Arbela in 331 B.C. Alexander the Great conquered the Medes and Persians, turning Greece into the world's third great empire. Greece dominated **from 331 to 168 B.C.**

Legs of Iron

20. What would the fourth powerful kingdom, symbolized by the iron legs, do to other nations? (Daniel 2:40.)

- Break them in pieces and crush them.
- Protect them from barbarian invasions.
- Make them pay high taxes every year.



After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire of Greece weakened and split into rival factions. At the battle of Pydna in **168 B.C.**, the "iron empire" of Rome crushed Greece. Rome continued to rule the world through the time Jesus carried on His ministry here on Earth. Rome came to its end in **A.D. 476.**

Think about the predictions we have just read. How could Daniel, a Hebrew living in the time of Babylon, have any idea of how empires would succeed each other hundreds of years into the future? We have a hard time figuring out tomorrow's weather or the stock market closings for next week! And yet Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome followed each other exactly as predicted, as any world history textbook demonstrates today.

Is God in control of the future? Can we have hope on the basis of His great plan? The answer is a resounding, YES!

Feet and Toes of Iron Mixed With Clay



21. In the metal image, the feet and toes were made of iron mixed with clay. This represented the fact that this kingdom would be: (Daniel 2:41, 42.)

- Sometimes warlike and sometimes peaceful.
- Divided— partly strong and partly weak.
- Sometimes ruled by good kings and sometimes ruled by bad kings.

The prophet predicted, not a fifth world empire, but a division of the iron monarchy of Rome. Rome would fracture into numerous kingdoms symbolized by the ten toes. During the fourth and fifth centuries (A.D. 351 to 476), barbaric invaders from the North poured down on the decaying Roman Empire, delivering blow after blow. Almost twenty Germanic tribes gained the territory of western Rome, but eventually numerous independent nations established themselves within the boundaries of western Europe. The statue's toes of iron mixed with clay represent the modern nations of Europe. The prophecy was literally fulfilled, and history again harmonizes with what God foretold.

Verse 43 tells us that efforts will be made to unite the post-Roman nations of Europe under one ruler. God, however, says this simply won't happen:

"They will not adhere to one another."

Many men down through history have tried to unite Europe. Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin invested enormous resources and countless lives in their efforts. But each one failed. History can't contradict the big picture in the Word of God. It remains accurate. And it assures us that the future is in God's hands and we can safely trust in His promises.

The Stone

After this period in which many different nations rule separately—as opposed to combining into one world power —another great event interrupts history. "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people" (vs. 44).

22. In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, a stone struck the metal statue on its feet. What happened then to all the kingdoms represented by the different metals in the image? (Daniel 2:44.)

- They became stronger than ever and defeated the kingdom represented by the stone.
- They were broken into pieces and were completely consumed by the stone.
- They weren't affected at all; only the image's feet were broken.

23. How long will the kingdom that is represented by the stone last? (Daniel 2:44.)

- Forever.
- Until Jesus returns.
- Until the end of the Roman Empire.

This kingdom is symbolized by the "stone" smashing into the statue's feet and crushing its gold, silver, bronze, and iron.

Read verse 45.



The rock cut out without hands represents the coming of the kingdom of God. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). At the second coming of Jesus Christ, sin will be crushed for all eternity. Christ's kingdom will be established forever. Today, we can see that all the details of Daniel's prophecy have been fulfilled except this final act—the striking of the statue by the stone. We are approaching the grand climax, Christ's return to our world. It will happen according to God's timetable, not what some supermarket tabloid says. Jesus is about to end the long, bloody struggle of human history and sweep us up to live eternally with Him.

Yes, we still live among the clash of "nation rising against nation." The world can be a frightening place. Ethnic conflicts keep flaring up. Pictures of children with distended bellies still haunt the evening news. We never know where a terrorist's bomb may strike next. Drive-by shootings rupture neighborhoods. We continue to fall victim to age-old afflictions and new plagues like AIDS.

But through all of this we can acknowledge a fact more important than these headlines—history is rushing toward one climax: a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. It's time to prepare to meet Jesus. The same hand that guided Daniel as he condensed the millenniums of history into a few verses in the Bible, can guide you as you try to make sense out of your life.

Does God care about you? YES He does! Listen to these words: "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31).

Hope in a trustworthy God can make a significant difference in your life. The world may seem to be breaking up all around us, but we are never on our own. The hand of God is guiding us with each step we take. If you will come to Jesus, He will give you a faith that will see you through every storm of life—no matter how fierce the wind, no matter how big the waves. There is peace in Jesus—"For He Himself is our Peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

— Prayer —

Dear Father in heaven, thank You for Your interest in my personal life. Thank You for telling me in advance the answers to my questions concerning the future of the world. Help me each day to let You control my life. Guide me. Keep me in Your care. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

(Note: A major source for the historical information in this course is God Cares, vols. 1 and 2 by C. Mervyn Maxwell.)