

GOD IS MY JUDGE (Part 1)

Daniel 1:3-21

AiM, 1/30/2026

We have the joy of continuing our study of the Book of Daniel tonight.

Last time together, we covered an introduction to this book and saw that the overarching theme of this book is this:

The absolute sovereignty and trustworthiness of the true and living God.

We will see that on display on virtually every page of this book.

Tonight, we will see it again, but something else we will consider in the book of Daniel is *how to respond rightly to God's sovereignty*.

Daniel will provide an example of this for us, beginning tonight, as we open up chapter 1.

Go ahead and turn your Bibles and your attention to Daniel 1.

My original plan was to try and cover the whole chapter tonight.

Since much of Daniel this is **narrative genre**, it's actually best to cover larger sections to keep the flow of the story without too many breaks...

(BUT...you all know how this goes...so, we will see how far we get tonight...and we'll just pick it up next time)

(ALSO...we will have a brief time of open discussion after)

Well, let's begin by reading vv. 1-7.

[READ]

Something that we want to do here as we begin tonight is just get to know this Daniel a bit more.

And this opening section gives us a pretty clear biographical portrait of this great man of God.

And it all begins when he was a very young man. In fact, he was most likely around 14 or 15 when we pick up his story.

Daniel's story begins when he is taken into Babylon as a captive exile – kidnapped really.

You'll remember from the opening 2 verses that **God** handed over Judah to mighty conqueror, King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire.

This was God's discipline on His people for centuries of idol-worship and stiff-arming of the prophets.

After Nebuchadnezzar overpowered Judah, he took the vessels from the house of God and brought them to them to the house of his god (likely Bel).

(And by the way, put a 'pin' in these vessels taken from God's temple to Babylon, they are an important part of another story in Daniel)

We saw this last time, but Nebuchadnezzar did this as a *powerplay* statement to showcase his superiority.

In young adult language today, we would call this a "flex".

"My god is bigger than your God".

But another part of this "flex" of power was that Nebuchadnezzar also took certain people out of Israel as hostages.

And this move was very strategic.

Let's pick up again in vv. 3-5 here and unpack this as we get to know Daniel.

vv. 3-5

- 3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles,
- 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.
- 5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to ^benter the king's personal service.

- Nebuchadnezzar ordered **Ashpenaz**, the chief of officials to oversee the selection and training of some of the sons of Israel.
 - o This chief, Ashpenaz, is who Daniel primarily interacts with in this chapter, so pay close attention to him.
- **“Chief of his Officials”** (could also be translated “eunuchs”). Some have considered the possibility of Daniel being himself a eunuch (or even made to be eunuch through mutilation). ^{1 2}
- That is possible, given that there is no evidence that Daniel was ever married,
- HOWEVER, I think it is not likely, just based on a possible meaning of this word.
- And furthermore, I don't think it's likely that Daniel was *made* a eunuch, especially given the King's criteria of “no physical defect”.
- SO, probably best simply to understand this group as a **“officials”** – *those with* governmental office.

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 769–770.

² Dykstra class notes

- That's what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to do with this group – turn them into **officials** who could serve him.

But notice next who Nebuchadnezzar's target was – the characteristics and criteria that he was focused on.

He orders Ashpenaz to go essentially kidnap from Israel a very selective group:

- **“Some of the sons of Israel...”**
 - This is that first wave of deportation, only a choice few were ripped out from their families and homeland (sons of Israel).
 - *Why?* Only those who could be useful (bc of their skill) to serve the king. This was simply part of his plundering of Israel.
 - And part of his strategy to strengthen the power of the Babylonian Empire by taking the best of the best in terms of human resources.
- **“Of royal seed and of the nobles”**
 - The cream of the crop – Daniel and his friends were of families with high social standing – leaders, rulers, and social poise.³ Nebuchadnezzar is taking the **elites**.
- But now notice, that Nebuchadnezzar specifically ordered Ashpenaz to bring **“Youths”**.
- **This is key.** Why youths? If his interest was the best of the best of human resources to make them his officials, why not take the adult leaders and officials who have experience?

³ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 60.

- The answer is that Nebuchadnezzar wanted **youths** so that he could fully immerse and indoctrinate them into the Babylonian worldview and culture.
- He thought what everyone thinks about youth – that they are totally impressionable and their convictions (if they even have any) are easily disarmed.
- And that is indeed his intent – to **reprogram** these gifted youths.
- So what does he do to reprogram and indoctrinate them? He sends them to college, of course.
- He enrolls them in what I'll call **Nebuchadnezzar's School for the Gifted.**

We'll talk about this "college" more in a moment.

But I want you to notice Nebuchadnezzar's reprogramming tactics.

I'll label them this way: ***flattery, formal education, food, and a forced name-change.***

Let's start with **flattery.**

Notice that Nebuchadnezzar goes after only those who have impressive characteristics – notice v. 4:

- **V. 4 ~ "[Youths] in whom there was no defect, who were good in appearance..."**
 - By the way, if this was the criteria, just think about what kind of young man Daniel was – thoroughly impressive.
 - Impressive external features, attractive...but not only physical beauty, but also intellectual giftedness.

- **V. 4 ~ “...[Youths] showing insight in every branch of wisdom, being thoroughly knowledgeable and discerning knowledge...”**

So, Nebuchadnezzar enrolls these youths on the basis of this criteria – this was the competitive application process to get into this elite university:

- *you are unlike ordinary people. You are superior in physical beauty, intellectual power, and social poise.*
- *You are important. And you have been selected strictly because of your significance. Therefore, you belong here in this elite program.*
- *Do you know what that can do to a young person’s pride!?*
- *That is so often the key that can dismantle someone’s guard and can ultimately disarm their convictions.*

So, this would be a first tactic – **flattery** ~ *which is an insincere praising of one’s vanity to gain an advantage or influence over them (Webster).*

Notice the end of v. 4 ~ “**...and he said for him to teach them the literature and tongue of the Chaldeans.**”

And notice the end of v. 5 “**...and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king’s personal service.**”

Here’s a second tactic – **formal education**. Like I said, “Nebuchadnezzar’s School for the Gifted”.

These gifted youths were to be trained in the literature and tongue of Chaldeans (Akkadian, rather than their native Hebrew).⁴

By the way (Chaldeans is just another name for Babylonians).

This is all part of the immersion strategy.

⁴ Dykstra notes, p.46.

The “literature” here is most likely a broad term that includes a full blown education – (remember it was a 3-year degree, v. 5 says).

This would have included training in the sciences, humanities, agriculture, law, architecture, history, mathematics, law, astronomy.⁵

And you say, “well, what’s the big deal?” That sounds okay.

And it certainly is okay as long as you **recognize** that education is never neutral.

And if you recognize that within the pages of academic literature there is always a worldview – and most often it is a godless worldview.

And indeed, that is Nebuchadnezzar’s intention here – to get them to imbibe a worldview from the Babylonian perspective.

Again – that’s why youths, rather than “adults”. The age for this kind of education in these days was generally 14-17.

To be what the king needed these gifted youths to be – to serve him as officials (v. 5) they needed to be **reprogrammed**.

How could they serve the king if they didn’t share his worldview?

Listen guys, in so many ways, this illustrates the way the world works.

The world wants to indoctrinate you.

And, YES! Listen, in our day, Colleges and Universities exert a tremendous influence on worldview and lifestyle formation.

Education is never a purely neutral enterprise – there is always a worldview at play.

Satan knows this! Academics are so often a portal to atheism.

⁵ Dykstra notes, p.46.

But it's not just the education piece.

In our day, colleges are often far more about a "lifestyle experience" than actual academic education.

You just need to be aware of that!

And whether you are in college or not, you know people who are!

And in our day, many have bought into the idea that college gives you 4 years where you don't yet have to grow up.⁶

Many imagine that your college years is a time where you get to continue acting like children who have no self-control or responsibilities.

Where your only responsibility is school (and many don't even take that seriously) and the rest of your time can be spend however you want.

What fills that time?

For too many it's just serving self with hours of video gaming, internet scrolling, binge-watching, playing sports, not sleeping, not eating well...

Essentially, the lie that culture feeds you is that between the ages of 18-25, you don't have to grow up yet, this is a time to just feed your pleasures.

This is where the whole "**adulging**" mindset comes from, by the way.

The world wants to you buy into this lie. You need to be awake to this!

But what is so helpful about Daniel's example is that you CAN be in that world while not compromising!

The answer is not building a remote compound and fencing it in or joining a monastery.

⁶ Prompted by thoughts in a sermon by Daron Roberts at GIBC (need to find exact link).

Daniel also will show us that you're never too young to have immovable convictions.

Daniel will show us how to stand firmly against the pull of the world – *in the world, but not of the world.*

So, Nebuchadnezzar goes after these youths with flattery, with formal education, and thirdly, with **food**.

Now, broader idea here really is **lifestyle** – but it is significant that he uses food in the training of these youths.

Notice v. 5 again:

v. 5 ~ “The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank...”

Dykstra notes (p. 47):

- *This word “**food**” here could be translated as “delicacies, rich food” – the royal food was lavish, extravagant food literally fit for a king, for it was the same food that he ate.*
- *It is possible that the king wanted to create within them a sense of obligation as part of his brainwashing of them.*
- *He may have wanted to obligate them into serving him by lifting up their standard of living to the point where they would never want to return to their past lifestyles.*

So, now, I just want you to think about this – for Nebuchadnezzar’s tactics to work, *what had to be in place in the hearts of these youths?*

→ *A worship of external impressiveness (brains and beauty).*

→ *A worship of their bellies/lifestyle (security, satisfaction, sophistication)*

→ *A worship of power (status, respect, significance, and control).*

We just need to acknowledge – those are POWERFUL temptations that can at any moment have a pull on our own hearts.

And that is the context that Daniel and his friends were thrust into.

Notice vv. 6-7 (and, in the flow of the text, this is the first time we meet Daniel):

vv. 6-7

6 Now among them [the gifted youths] from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

7 Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

Here we find another crucial step in their reprogramming a fourth tactic: **a forced name change.**

And here is where the **theological** nature of this whole indoctrination comes into clear view.

I want to show you that this was not merely a linguistic or cultural changing of names – this was intended to undermine their Jewish heritage and God.

This was not merely a swap of name for name, but of **God for god.**

In each these young men's original Hebrew names, there was embedded a reference to the true and living God.

The Hebrew word: *El* means God and *-iah (or -yah)*⁷ is an abbreviation for Yahweh and you can listen for that in their names:

Daniel; Hanaiah; Mishael; Azariah.

What we find as we consider their names leads to an important observation.

While history doesn't tell us anything about the parents of Daniel or his friends, we can see that the fear of God was central in these homes.

⁷ Dykstra notes (p. 48). And section on parenting was prompted by implications from Dykstra's sermon on this passage.

And that begins at BIRTH! So important for us as young parents to embrace!

And the lasting evidences of their parents' godly influence will be confirmed as we consider the convictions of these 14-year-olds.

But notice the theological attack here – in each of their new Babylonian names there is a reference to one of Nebuchadnezzar's gods.

Consider the meaning of their Hebrew names and their targeted, theological re-naming:

- Daniel means: **God is my Judge.**

I love this. And I want you to remember that.

I think it capture so much of what controlled Daniel's conscience and convictions.

And just a sidebar comment here, because here in v. 6 we're meeting the author Daniel for the first time.

I want you to be oriented to the reality that much skeptical criticism has been leveled at the historicity of this man Daniel.

It is argued that he was not a real, historical person.

Rather, that he was a either a fictional character created for inspiration.

Or that it was written by someone much later than this time using a pen-name "Daniel".

But the bible itself does not allow us to entertain such objections.

We find affirmations of Daniel's historicity from two key biblical sources: Ezekiel (his contemporary in exile, by the way); and **Jesus!**

Turn quickly over to Ezekiel 14 (that's the book right before Daniel).

Ezekiel 14:12-14

12 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying,
13 “Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness,
and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send
famine against it and cut off from it both man and beast,
14 even *though* these three men, Noah, **Daniel** and Job were in its midst, by
their *own* righteousness they could *only* deliver themselves,” declares
the Lord GOD.

And then again, look at v. 20 he mentions Daniel again -- notice **verse 20**

*20 even though Noah, **Daniel** and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.”*

Notice that twice, Ezekiel names Daniel alongside Noah and Job, both historical people.

But to argue that Ezekiel is mentioning a fictional (or obscure) character alongside two historical icons is completely foreign to the text.

This is a clear affirmation of Daniel’s historicity and also his character of godliness and righteousness.

Praise God for this man whom we will get to know and learn from through our study!

Daniel is one of those rare individuals of whom nothing negative is said in Scripture!

He is alluded to in the Hebrews 11 “hall of faith” as one of the men of whom the world was not worthy (Heb. 11:38).

Although not mentioned by name, Hebrews 11:32, 33 talks about: “*the prophets, who by faith...shut the mouths of lions*”.

That’s clearly Daniel!

But in addition to Ezekiel’s (and Hebrew’s) affirmation of Daniel’s identity, we find the most important affirmation which comes from **Jesus Christ**.

Turn over to Matthew 24 for a moment – you can highlight this one.

In Matthew 24:14-15, Jesus is predicting the “abomination of Desolation” which is to come *in the future*.

Listen to what Jesus says, speaking of the end times and affirming Daniel as the author of the book of Daniel:

Matthew 24:15-16

15 *“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through **Daniel the prophet**, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.*

This alone – from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ – should put all debate about Daniel’s authorship to rest.

Okay – side bar over – back to our text.

So, Daniel means “God is my Judge” – and notice (on handout) the targeted changing of their names:

- **Daniel:** *God is my Judge* → **Beltshazzar:** *Bel (aka Baal), protect the king/his life*
- **Hananiah:** *The Lord is gracious* → **Shadrach:** *the command of Aku (a Babylonian moon god)*
- **Mishael:** *Who is like the Lord?* → **Meshach:** *who is like Aku?*
- **Azariah:** *The Lord is my Helper* → **Abed-nego:** *servant of Nego (aka Nebo, god of vegetation)*

And so, the intent of indoctrination is clear.

And this is the context in which these 4 young men find themselves.

Being effectively kidnapped and now fully immersed in a current of godless ideologies and targeted attacks.

And what we will see next is that Daniel will lead the way in taking a stand for God with unwavering convictions.

We will find this on display in vv. 8-16.

In Daniel's response to Nebuchadnezzar's indoctrination strategies we can observe **12** exemplary marks of living with integrity.

(Don't worry, we're only going to get through 1 tonight...you'll have to come back next time for the rest!)

12 Exemplary Marks of Living with Uncompromising Convictions:

1. A Realization of the World's Strategies

Clearly, although he was young, Daniel was not naïve to the world's strategies to deconstruct his faith and dethrone God.

Pastor Dykstra notes:

*"Bottom line: Daniel and his friends perceived that Nebuchadnezzar was subtly attempting to wean them from their loyalty to God and condition them to worship Babylonian gods."*⁸

He was awake to the threats and discerning! He knew that the battle here was not merely cultural or academic, but spiritual and theological.

We'll see that next time in bursting colors next time.

But tonight, I want to ask you: *have you realized what the world is?*

Are you aware of its pull and its strategies?

This requires sobriety – a clear-mind and a suspicion of the darkness of the world.

You can't be naïve. You have to be spiritually "street-smart".

⁸ Dykstra, *course notes for BE 607: Daniel*

For so many young adults, perhaps you've grown up in the church, the world seems so alive, so flashy, so interesting and curious.

And you're completely unaware of the threat – you're blind to it because you're naïve. But you don't think you are.

Too often we are so self-deceived that despite those who might warn us, we convince ourselves that we are not naïve.

We convince ourselves and perhaps even others that we are in control of the situation.

We make up all sorts of reasons why it's totally neutral and normal to experience and try different things.

So, we rationalize and stiff-arm parents, and pastors, and friends who offer godly counsel.

And you want to know when you're doing this?

A key indication is that you defend yourself with this argument: *“well, such and such thing **is not sin...**”*

You can be sure that you're off track when you're thinking that way.

A believer should not be concerned with whether something is a sin or not...he should want to get as FAR away even the smell of sin...

...not try to get close to it!

A believer who is growing in maturity and convictions is a believer who abandons measures his activities **not** by the question, *“is this a sin”*

But instead measures his/her actions by the question: *“what will help me RUN and glorify God and be useful in God's purposes!?”*

*“What things in my life are in that Heb. 12 category of **sin AND weight** that so easily entangles me?”*

Romans 12 commands us NOT to be conformed to this world but to be transformed!

That's what a true believer must desire – transformation! Maturation!

Not conformity (or flirting with conformity) to the world!

Beloved young adults, the world wants to snare you and entangle.

The world wants you⁹ to dress like the world; talk like the world; laugh at its jokes; watch its movies; embrace its ideologies....

The world does NOT want you to go against the grain!

The world screams at us: If you're not going to go along with us...get out of our way and DO NOT judge us! Don't rock the boat.

Moreover, the world threatens us – if you don't go with the flow, you can **forget** that job promotion, that class grade, that social popularity!

“Conform or get canceled!” says our world.

And I am so burdened that you be different!

I pray for you constantly that you would be men and women of convictions that are not asleep to the pull of the world!

I long for you to see the world for what it is – a GRAVEYARD!

*It wants to immerse you and indoctrinate you and steal your usefulness to God and your joy **and if possible your eternity!***

Oh, I plead with you tonight to see the world for what it is!

Oh, WHY would a man gain the world but lose his soul! Please don't let that be you!

⁹ Prompted by Dykstra's sermon on this passage.

You must wake up to the BATTLE that you're in!

2 Timothy 2:4

"No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."

1 John 2:15-17

"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

You need to understand the **poison and danger** that lurks beneath the surface of all the flashy things this world offers you.

Bottom line: You cannot trust the world and you cannot trust your heart!

Next time, we will pick up in v. 8 and see how Daniel is an extraordinary example of integrity and unwavering convictions.

Not compromising. No matter the cost. No matter the pressures. No matter the pleasures.

And how did he do this?

I think the first step is embracing the truth in Daniel's name: ***God is my Judge.***

Beloved young adults...**THAT** is how you must live. With a controlling awareness of Divine Accountability.

Next time we will pick in v. 8 and consider these 12 marks of living with convictions in a world that wants you to compromise.

Let's pray and then we'll have a brief open discussion time.

[PRAY AND DISCUSS]