

Daniel 1

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Preacher: Rt. Rev. Mike Stewart

- [0 : 0 0] Welcome, people under the rule of the mighty Babylonian Empire. My name is Beth and I'm a reporter for the Babylonian Chronicle, the greatest newspaper in the empire.
- ! I'm here today to do a live interview with two of the most influential men in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar. King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and Ashpenaz, Nebuchadnezzar's chief palace official, and the head of the Babylon University.
- We are here to discuss the graduating class of the Babylon University and so to learn about the up-and-coming wise men of Babylon.
- It is my great honor to welcome you gentlemen. Ah, yes. Thank you very much.
- Right. King Nebuchadnezzar, I understand that the graduates of the Babylon University, trained by Ashpenaz, over the past three years, recently stood before you for their final examinations to demonstrate all that they had learned.
- [1 : 4 4] Some of them were very impressive. And this year I chose not one or two, but four of the graduates to serve me in my court.
- I was so impressed by these four that I let the rest of them join my rebel of magicians and enchanters, even though they were rather a sorry lot.
- Some of them might still be able to protect me from bad omens and bad dreams. And I've found them, you know, I've fed them enough that I needed to get something back from them.
- They might as well do me some good. Ashpenaz, tell us more about the origins of this class of graduates. Are they mainly diviners raised in Babylon?
- Yes. Well, we've had students from Babylon and other empires, but the four students that King Neb chose to serve at court, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, well, they're actually from a land that we, I mean King Nebuchadnezzar, recently conquered.
- [2 : 5 4] Now we spared their lives when we, I mean your magnificence, King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered the land of Judah, including the capital city of Jerusalem.
- Ah, yes, such lovely gold from the temple in Jerusalem. Some of the best pieces that I've ever seized and brought home.
- We put them on display in the houses of our gods just to show anybody who wants to visit the ruins of Jerusalem or the splendor of Babylon, that our Babylonian gods had defeated the God of the Jews.
- Very good, your majesty. But back to these Judean graduates. Yes. Well, when we, I mean your illustrious recalcitrance, King Nebuchadnezzar, when we conquered Judah, I initially selected these Judeans from among many, from the members of the nobility and the royal class.
- They were the cream of the crop. I mean notable skills, amazing wisdom, even though they were still just teenagers. I imagine that they were grateful that you'd spared their lives, that you identified them as cream of the crop.

[4 : 12] Well, they better be. I mean, what an opportunity. And this is the puzzling part. I mean, right from the beginning. Well, they've been respectable enough, I'd say. Quick to learn. The best students I've ever had, in fact.

But I was giving my welcome to Babylon University speech, which is a banger. And I did tell them, this is what you say, this is what you think, et cetera, et cetera.

And I know that they were listening, and yet they've always remained separate, just a bit independent. A little superstitious? You could say that.

Resolved to seek the good of our city, but also resolved to not become Babylonians. And they're resolved not to worship our Babylonian gods using our Babylonian customs, which are obviously the best.

But they want to continue to serve their god using their customs. Surely they haven't. Babylon, I mean, King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah.

[5 : 16] We proved our god's power. Well, now, thank you, reporter Beth from the Babylonian Chronicle. We will be hearing a bit more about your interview a little bit later on.

But first of all, gang, let's do a little bit of a recap. Can I sit down here? This is a long way down. You know, that's the definition of old age, apparently.

When you bend down to tie up your shoelaces, you ask yourself, is there anything else I can do while I'm down here? And that was quite the workout, those songs this morning, hey? So let's just do a little bit of a recap about the book of Daniel, Clash of Kings.

You see, the book of Daniel is named after and written by Daniel, who lived many, many centuries ago in the 6th century BC.

And it records the events in his life and the meaning of the visions that he saw. For many, many years, God's people had disobeyed him.

[6 : 24] For many, many years. And because of this, God allowed a foreign king of an empire called Babylon to come and take over and take God's people into exile, into his own empire, the empire of Babylon.

The king's name, as we just heard, is Nebuchadnezzar. But the Babylonian Chronicle calls him King Neb. And so we'll call him King Neb as well, all right?

He's known as King Neb to his friends. Now, King Neb chose a young man, handsome, much like me, but not so young. And his three friends, very, very smart, much like you.

He chose them to serve him in the palace and to train them in the ways of the Babylonian Empire to study and to train.

So he sent Daniel and his three friends to Babylon University. What about that, hey? So they went off to Babylon University.

[7 : 36] And guess what? Another thing that King Neb did was change their names. Because, you see, the Hebrew name Daniel means God is my judge.

That's what the Hebrew name Daniel means. You see, King Neb wanted Daniel and wanted his friends to forget about God, the one true God, and to start serving his false gods.

And what Daniel and his friends had to figure out, now that they were in Babylon under a new king, they had to figure out how to stay faithful to the one true God.

The one true God that they loved and the one true God that they served, while now living in a different country, with different customs, and under a different king.

That's what Daniel and his friends had to figure out. And that's what his book is about, how to stay faithful to God. Even when all the people around you want you to forget God.

[8 : 54] And what Daniel's book teaches us, amongst other things, is that even though difficult things happen to God's people in the world, even though bad things happen to God's people in the world, if we stay faithful to him, God will bless us, God will protect us, and God will give us everything we need to stay faithful to him.

Why? Why? Because God is the true king. God is the forever king. And he is ruling over all human history, right?

All human history, all kings, all empires. He is forever reigning. And will become the crucified king.

He is all powerful, all present, the true king, and the judge who rules over all kings, all queens, all prime ministers, and all presidents.

And one day, every knee will bow before the one true king. Now, we're going to hear a little bit more from reporter Beth and her interview right now.

[10 : 19] But just before we do that, let me ask you one question, if I may. What's your favorite thing to eat? Me? Burgers? Sometimes hot dogs? Sometimes french fries?

Sometimes burgers? Sometimes hot dogs? Sometimes french fries? Sometimes burgers? Sometimes. Sometimes. Sometimes. Sometimes. Sometimes burgers?

Sometimes burgers? What about you guys? What's your favorite thing to eat? Yeah? Chicken pork pie. Chicken pork pie. Yum.

That sounds so good. Anyone else in the congregation? What's your favorite thing to eat? Pizza. Pizza? Ramen? Well, ramen?

Nice. Curry? Nice. Well, we're going to hear now a little bit more from Beth and the Babylonian Chronicle.

[11 : 15] And you know what? Daniel and his friends were offered some very, very, very nice food from the king's table. So let's hear about what happened, shall we?

Right from the very beginning, these Jodeans had courage and authority like I've never seen in any of the other peoples that I had conquered.

In fact, when I first met that Daniel, he brazenly claimed that their one God, who is king over all the earth, had given Jerusalem to me as a judgment against the sins of the people of Judah, though clearly I had conquered their city.

It was a bit annoying, puzzling, a bit silly, but you know these backwards people, they have their superstitions. Only one God? What else sets these four Judeans apart from the rest of the class?

Well, their eating habits. I mean, I told Daniel and Shad and Shaq and Bendy they would be able to eat the king's food and drink the king's wine, but they requested that they be allowed to consume meals of vegetables and water.

[12 : 36] What? You never told me about this. What was wrong with my food and wine? One wine! Your majesty, even the scraps of your food and the dregs of your wine are the most glorious in the kingdom.

Everyone in Babylon knows that. But the Judeans, well, they wanted to remain Judean and they felt that eating your food, even though it's the best, well, they respectfully but firmly communicated they wanted to continue serving their one God, king over all the earth, even Babylon.

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if they needed, maybe it was food laws. Maybe they're worried about offerings to other gods. Maybe they didn't want to owe you too much for their awesome education. And, you know, at first my steward and I, we were concerned that the vegetarians would fall into a far worse condition.

I mean, vegetables and water. But we were worried they wouldn't be worth training. But then? Well, I mean, they were so clearly and respectfully resolved.

They were so likable and wise. And? Well, one of them suggested that we do a trial. He said, let's do 10 days and we can compare their appearance afterwards with the other students and, well, we could deal with them as we saw fit.

[13 : 58] And then? Well, I mean, 10 days is long enough for a trial. We'd be able to see if they were starting to waste away. And we could, you know, fatten them back up if it looked like a disaster.

The Judeans were so likable and wise. And it just seemed like, you know, we should give them a shot. Surely, they don't eat just vegetables and water?

No meat? No wine? Your Majesty, they consumed only veggies and water. Surely, it didn't work.

I know. Well, but at the end of the 10 day trial, they were better looking. They were stronger. They were more athletic, full of riz. Even the youth who had been eating your food and drinking your wine, sire, they were better looking than them.

I cannot believe it. We are talking about the four Judeans, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, right?

[15 : 07] They eat only vegetables? Because they want to remain faithful to their single, solitary God whose temple I destroyed?

But those four are 10 times better than all of the rest of my magicians and enchanters in my entire empire. They're wiser and more agile.

They know more Babylonian literature and history. They know who codified Babylonian law as we use it today. And Daniel, he has more understanding of visions and dreams than all my great enchanters that have ever been enchanting since before he was born.

All on veggie power, your majesty. They were determined and somehow it seems to be helping them, even after three years.

But how do you explain this, Ashpenaz? I wish I had an answer, but I don't. At the conclusion of their examinations, Daniel did say to me that their Lord God had given them wisdom and knowledge.

[16 : 30] He's puzzling this, Daniel. He's puzzling this, Daniel. Constantly performing way above everybody else and making these incredible claims that his God is king over all the earth and that he gives someone this or that.

The Lord God gave Jerusalem to me. The Lord God gave them favor and wisdom and knowledge. He probably claims that the Lord God gave them favor and, you know, with you and your steward and all, made them likable to Babylonian officials despite their determination to be Judean vegetarians instead of eating from the bounty of my table.

Do you think there's anything to Daniel's claim? Do we think there's anything to Daniel's claim?

That there's just one true God? Thank you so much, Beth and King Neb and Ashpenaz. Can I ask Ashpenaz, what is riz? Charisma. Charisma.

There you have it. Daniel and his friends were full of charisma. Now, isn't that something? You see, we've got to remember again that King Neb wanted Daniel and his friends to stop serving their God and instead serve his false gods.

[18 : 00] But Daniel said no. Daniel said no. No. In Daniel's day, and if you remember, that's in the sixth century BC, way, way, way, 27 centuries ago.

In Daniel's day, to eat food from someone's table meant that you were in agreement with that person.

It meant that you were loyal to that person. It meant that you shared the beliefs of that person. And Daniel and his friends in good conscience could not do this.

And they were disciplined enough, and they loved God enough to say no to the king's food as a matter of conscience.

Even though, I suspect, the king's food looked very yummy. You see, Daniel and his friends wanted to stay free to serve the one true God, the forever king.

[19 : 12] And in doing this, they showed that God is faithful to look after those who will serve him and who will love him.

And that God blesses those who will obey him. And guess what? After Daniel and his friends said no to the king's food and the king's drink, after ten days, as we just heard, Daniel and his friends ended up stronger and smarter than anyone else in Babylon University.

Isn't that something? Now, one last thought for today. On the front of the bulletins, which hopefully everyone's had a chance to see, we have fantastic pictures, thanks to Sadie Roberts, who put this together for us today.

And as Jordan said, there'll be a different picture every week this month as you walk through the book of Daniel together. And Sadie has highlighted some words there, which come from Daniel chapter 1, verses 8 and 9.

Daniel chapter 1, verses 8 and 9 are the key verses in this first chapter of Daniel, verses 8 and 9. Let me just read them quickly for you.

[20 : 36] 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.

And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

You see, God is the true king who gives us what we need to stay faithful to him. Even when other people around us want us to forget him and turn away from him.

And we will see over the next few weeks, in everything that happened in the life of Daniel, it was God who's really in charge and not King Neb.

It's God who was in charge of what happens to us. So, here we are then, 27 centuries after Daniel lived.

[21 : 46] What's the date today, by the way? August, August 3rd. Here we are. August 3rd, 2025. 27 centuries after Daniel.

And I have a question for us to close. Will we be like Daniel and love God above everyone else?

Will we be like Daniel and love God above everything else? And be resolved to serve him only.

Even when people all around us in the world today may tell us to forget God. Will we be like Daniel? Because if we be resolved like Daniel to be faithful to God, God will bless us.

God will take care of us. And God will give us everything that we need to serve him in the world today and in your life and in mine.

[22 : 54] Remember the memory verse that we're focusing on each week and you had at Bible camp, Psalm 47, verse 7, as we've already sung today.

For God is what? God is the king of all the earth. For God is the king of all the earth.

He is worthy of our praise. Shall we pray for a minute? Lord, we thank you that you are the God that Daniel and his friends served faithfully.

And you are the same God who asks us to serve you faithfully as well. Thank you that you give us everything that we need to serve you and be faithful to you in our lives.

Help us to be like Daniel, to love you more than everyone else, to love you more than anything else. We thank you, Father, that you have sent Jesus into the world for our salvation.

[24 : 04] That he is reigning forevermore. Send your Holy Spirit to each one of us today that we might serve you faithfully now and always.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.