

The purpose of this leader's guide is to be a tool for Sunday Classes and Life Group leaders to follow the sermon series with their group. Our hope is that this guide will give you a head start for your study and will allow your group to respond to what they've heard and apply it in life.*

Background When Daniel wrote this book, the Babylonian empire (ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar) is rising in power in the sixth century B.C. It begins with Daniel's exile, and it ends with the Persians (ruled by King Cyrus) overthrowing the Babylonian empire. The book includes the rise and fall of different world empires, but these are all acts of God's sovereignty in working out His plan. There are many memorable actions that occur in Daniel (lions den, fiery furnace, etc.), but each of them serve as a backdrop to what *God* is sovereignly doing through Daniel and the other characters in this book.

Daniel Chapter 1

Introductory Questions:

Waking up to different. Open the discussion in your group about how our culture has changed just in our lifetime. Discuss this in the context of school, work, and play. Possibly in the context of relativism, entitlement, etc. This is the case for the scene in Daniel chapter 1. Daniel and his friends face great challenges in a foreign land. But in the midst of challenges, God is in not silent.

Introduction and Context of Chapter 1:

The first chapter can be broken into three main parts. First, it introduces Daniel and his friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), and it explains how they were exiled to Babylon (verses 1-7). Next, it describes Daniel's faithfulness to God and how he and his friends refuse to be defiled (verses 8-16). Finally, it recounts how Daniel and his friends were able to find favor before the king (verses 17-21).

Observation vs. 1-7

These verses describe the setting and who is at play. Verse 1 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem, and the next verse uses interesting language to describe this takeover. Daniel writes that *the Lord* gave King Jehoiakim of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. This shows that in the midst of the entire story, God is sovereignly at work. Verses 3-7 describe some of the specific types of people that the king wants brought in: the royal family, youths without blemish, and those who are skillful in wisdom, amongst others. He wants the best of the best, and he wants to teach them the language and culture of the Chaldeans (v. 4). He also instructs them to be fed a portion of the food that he himself ate (v. 5). The chief of the eunuchs gives them different names, and he gives Daniel the name of Belteshazzar. By doing this, the king wants to transform these young men into Babylonians. He wants them to use a different language, learn the literature, eat different food, and even change their names. He attempts to change their whole identity.

Observation vs. 8-16

Verse 8 begins by contrasting Daniel's decisions with the king's decrees. The first word in verse 8 is "but", showing that Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the king's food or drinking the king's wine. This is one of the most significant verses in chapter 1. Daniel then does something bold: he asks the chief official to allow him to eat different food. This is no small favor, because remember, Daniel and his land have just been exiled, and he is not in power. However, God displays more of his power and authority by giving Daniel favor in the sight of the chief

official (v. 9). As a result of this, Daniel is able to reach an agreement. He and his friends will be allowed to eat vegetables and drink water (instead of eating and drinking the king's food), and their appearance will be evaluated after that (v. 12-13). At the end of these 10 days, they were found to be in better appearance than the others who ate the king's food, so they were able to continue with their special diet. Once again, this displays God's sovereign favor over Daniel and his friends. It is also a demonstration of Daniel's faith in God to work in the midst of persecution for their beliefs.

Observation vs. 17-21

Daniel and the three others were tested in their wisdom and understanding, and they were found to be "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters" (v. 20). They weren't just slightly better in skill to the others; they were far and away superior. However, the main actor in this section isn't Daniel and his friends, but God. Verse 17 tells us that it was God who gave them "learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." Several times in this chapter we see the words used that put God's work on display even when His people are in captivity (v. 2 The Lord delivered, v.9 God had caused, v.17 God gave).

General Reflection:

- 1) What does this passage teach us about God?
- 2) What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- 3) What is a command to obey in this passage? What has God revealed in your life that needs changing? What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

Personal Reflection/Application

- 4) In verse 8, Daniel writes that he made a decision to "not defile himself with the king's food". He sought to be holy. It seems the church culture today has redefined what it means to be "free in Christ" and lost a sense of holiness. How do these two work together? What does holiness look like in your own life?
- 5) God gave Daniel and his friends favor while they were in exile. Some believe that if we follow God, that troubles or trials will not come (prosperity gospel). But the prosperity gospel is hard to find in scripture, especially in Daniel. What does Daniel chapter 1 tell us about God's character? What steps can we take when trials come, to trust God's character as Daniel did?
- 6) The book begins with an exile of God's people into a foreign land. How does this image of defeat show us a picture of the gospel? How does Daniel's life give us a "picture of Christ" in verses 8-14.)
- 7) Daniel and his friends are placed into a new environment and into a new culture. How do they engage this new culture? How do they remain faithful to God? What challenges in our culture are you facing? How does engaging the culture while remaining faithful to God look in your own life?

Prayer

Father, we know that you do not promise your children a life free from pain or trials or tribulation. But we thank you that you are sovereign and that your promise to be with us through tough times. We ask that you build our faith and trust in you to work even in the midst of hard times.

*Resources and quotes used for this study guide: gotquestions.org and the ESV study bible.