



DANIEL

Unshakable Trust — in — Uncertain Times



Sunday
September 13, 2026

Daniel 1:1-21

Example Teaching Rhythm

Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes

This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.

Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes

Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.

Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes

This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.

Prayer: 10 Minutes

Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond**. Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

Highlight - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.

Explain - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Apply - Application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

Respond - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? - Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

TESTING

Revealing what was already there

Introduction

Nebuchadnezzar wins. That's how the chapter opens – not with Daniel, not with a hero, but with a losing king and a captured city. Three verses in, before Daniel has said a single word, the empire has already seized the temple vessels and started sorting Judah's best young men into a re-education pipeline. If you stopped reading at verse 4, this would be a story about who's in charge, and the answer would be obvious: Babylon.

Then verse 2 does something strange to that certainty. It says the Lord gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. Not "Babylon was stronger." Not "Judah's sin caught up with them, and Babylon happened to be standing there." The verb belongs to God, and it's aimed at the very event that looks, on its surface, like God losing. Scripture rarely announces its real subject this early or this plainly. Usually you have to dig for it. Here it's sitting in the second sentence, daring you to keep reading as if Babylon were still the one calling the shots.

That's the lens the whole chapter asks you to hold, because everything that follows is designed to look like total control from one direction only. New names, assigned to erase old identities. A curriculum, designed to overwrite loyalty. Rations from the king's own table, designed to make four captive teenagers feel the weight of whose kingdom they're now living inside. Nebuchadnezzar is playing every card he has. And the chapter's quiet insistence – repeated three separate times before it's over – is that none of his cards are the ones actually deciding the outcome.

The pivot happens in a single verse most readers move past too quickly. Daniel doesn't confront the king. He doesn't organize the other captives. He asks – carefully, respectfully, through the proper channel – not to eat the food. It's the smallest possible act of resistance available to a person with no power at all. And the text treats it as the hinge on which the entire chapter turns.

So before you get to the vegetables: what's the smallest line you've already decided you won't cross, long before anyone's tested you on it – and is it actually decided, or just something you're hoping you'd do?

Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- The Lord "gave" Jerusalem to Babylon (v.2) – the same verb used later for favor and wisdom (vv.9, 17). When have you only recognized God's hand in a loss after the fact?
- Daniel's request in verse 8 is tiny – not a refusal to serve, just a question about food. Why does Scripture treat something this small as the chapter's turning point?
- Everyone else in the program accepted the new names, language, and food. Daniel drew one line, not ten. How do you tell which lines are worth drawing?
- Daniel's test was measurable – 10 days, then compare. Where have you settled for a vague intention over something you could actually check?
- The four were found ten times better than every adviser already in court (v.20). Does your faithfulness need an audience, or does it hold whether anyone's grading it or not?

A ship's keel is buried under every deck built on top of it, and its only job is to hold when the water turns violent. A keel that shifts mid-storm doesn't warn you – it just lets the ship list, slowly, until it's too late.

- Daniel's decision in verse 8 is a keel, not a mast. No one was watching when he made it. But it was laid down before the storm – the years, the pressure, an empire built to reshape him – ever arrived. That's the only reason it held once the storm came.

Highlight | Daniel 1:1-21

Read the chapter for its shape before its content, and a pattern surfaces: three moments of giving, each crediting God with an outcome Nebuchadnezzar would claim as his own. Verse 2 – the Lord gives the city into Babylon's hand. Verse 9 – God gives Daniel favor with the official over the training program. Verse 17 – God gives all four young men knowledge, and Daniel specifically his gift for interpreting visions. Nebuchadnezzar never suspects whose hand is actually behind it.

Verses 3-7 show how patient the empire's strategy is. Not violence – cultivation: take the strongest young men, feed them well, teach them everything Babylon knows, rename them after Babylonian gods, give it three years. It's built to make Daniel forget there's anything to resist at all.

Verse 8 is the one place a captive says no to anything – and even then, Daniel asks rather than refuses. Verses 9-16 linger over how that request played out, giving more space to a plate of vegetables than to an entire Babylonian education.

By verse 20, four captives are found ten times sharper than every wise man already serving the king, with no explanation offered beyond verse 17.

- Of the three "giving" moments – defeat, favor, insight – which is hardest for you to credit to God rather than circumstance?
- Daniel let Babylon take his name, language, and most of his education. Why that plate of food, specifically, as the line?

Explain | Consider the Context

This is 605 BC – the first wave, not the last. Jerusalem still stands; the temple hasn't fallen. Daniel is living in the early, uncertain middle of a disaster still unfolding, decades before Judah knows how bad it will get.

Nebuchadnezzar's re-education program had precedent – strip the name, absorb the language, feed them from the palace, and three years later you've produced loyal administrators who've forgotten what they once were loyal to. What makes Daniel's exception worth noticing isn't that he escaped the program, but that inside a system engineered to erase resistance, he found one square foot to stand on and didn't move.

Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem during these same years, telling those left behind that the Babylonian threat was under God's hand, not the end of the story. Later, once the exiles were settled in Babylon, he'd write to them with the same message: don't lose hope, because God hadn't lost control. Daniel 1 cites neither word – it just behaves as though it's already true.

- Daniel accepted almost everything Babylon imposed on him and resisted almost nothing – except this. What does that selectivity teach you about which battles are worth fighting?
- If this had been Daniel's fifteenth year in exile instead of his first, would his resolve in verse 8 surprise you more, or less?

Apply | Discuss as a Group

Most people picture faithfulness as a dramatic, public stand. Daniel 1 pictures it as a habit formed in private, tested almost by accident. Nobody set out to test Daniel – the trial in verse 12 exists because he proposed it himself, making his own decision measurable.

Daniel didn't wait to see how he'd feel when the pressure arrived. He'd already decided, long before the eunuch pushed back. Most of us leave our convictions loose until the moment tests them, then find out, to our own surprise, what we actually believe. Daniel skipped that surprise – he wasn't discovering his resolve under pressure, he was executing a decision already made.

If your walk with God only shows up in the big, visible moments, you're missing where this chapter locates faithfulness: not in the ten-times-better outcome of verse 20, but in the quiet, ungraded decision of verse 8, months before anyone was measuring anything.

- What's one place you're waiting to see how you'll respond, instead of deciding in advance?
- Is there a pressure trying to rename you the way Babylon renamed Daniel? What would it cost to hold one line inside it?
- What would it look like to make one conviction measurable this week, instead of leaving it vague?

Respond | How should I live/pray?

Daniel I doesn't ask you to overhaul your entire life under pressure. It asks you to find the one line worth holding, decide on it before you're tested, and hold it whether or not the outcome is ever measured or noticed. Everything else in the chapter – the name, the language, the curriculum – Daniel let go of without a fight. He wasn't trying to win every battle. He was trying to win the one that mattered.

This week, that might mean naming, specifically, the one pressure that's asking you to be reshaped – at work, in a relationship, in what you allow yourself to consume or excuse – and deciding, now, before you're forced to, what you will and won't do about it. Daniel didn't wait for the eunuch to make the first move. He walked into the conversation already resolved. It might mean proposing your own version of the ten-day test – something concrete enough that in a set amount of time, you'd actually know whether you kept your word or didn't. It might simply mean telling someone else in your group what you've decided, so the decision has a witness besides you.

Nothing in this chapter suggests Daniel was angling for the ten-times-better outcome when he made his request in verse 8. He wasn't negotiating for advantage. He asked for something small, held it, and let God do whatever God wanted to do with the results. That's a different kind of freedom than most of us are used to operating in – not the pressure to perform well enough to earn a good outcome, but the permission to simply hold the line and leave what happens next alone.

- Where is Babylon currently trying to rename you, and what would it cost to resolve – today, not someday – what you'll do about it?
- Who needs to hear from you this week that a small, unglamorous decision, held quietly, is exactly where God tends to do his clearest work?

Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead – not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

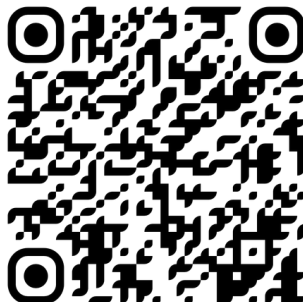
Additional Commentary

- On sim al-lev (שִׁים עַל־לֵב) – "resolved" (v.8): literally "set upon the heart." A settled-intent idiom, the same construction used for fixed resolve elsewhere (Malachi 2:2). Daniel's decision predates the conflict that tests it.
- On natan (נָתַן) – "gave": the chapter's structural spine – the Lord gives Jehoiakim into Babylon's hand (v.2), gives Daniel favor with the chief eunuch (v.9), gives all four young men wisdom, Daniel specifically insight into visions (v.17). Nebuchadnezzar hands out food, names, and education, certain the giving is his to control. The narrator keeps quietly correcting him.
- On chesed and rachamim (חֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים) – "favor and compassion" (v.9): chesed is elsewhere the Old Testament's term for God's covenant loyalty to Israel; paired here with rachamim (tender mercy), the two words together describe a loyalty moving through a pagan official with every incentive to withhold it.
- On nasah (נָסָה) – "test" (v.12): the same root behind Abraham's test in Genesis 22:1 and Israel's wilderness testing in Deuteronomy 8:2 – one of the oldest patterns in the text.
- On pathbag (פַּתְבֵּג) – "royal food" (vv.5, 8, 13): a Persian loanword naming a specific category of court rations, rooting the narrative in real palace administration.
- On asor yadot (עֶשֶׂר יָדוֹת) – "ten times better" (v.20): literally "ten hands," echoing the ten-day trial of verse 12 – a small test producing a categorical result.
- On the renaming (v.7) – Daniel becomes Belteshazzar ("Bel protect his life"), a name likely built on the Babylonian god Bel. His friends' names – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – are widely thought to follow the same pattern, replacing names built on the Hebrew word for God with ones tied to Babylonian deities, most clearly Abednego ("servant of Nebo"). A foreign god spoken over them every time their name is used.

Community Group Resource Page

Visit our website to view our **leadership resources**.

From Community Group training and resources to Discipleship Group starter guides, we want to equip you to make disciples.



Additional Study

Watch/Listen

Bible Project - Daniel



See a collection of videos, classes, and articles that dive into the book of [Daniel](#).

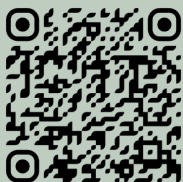
Bible Project - The Exiled Way



See a collection of videos, classes, and articles that dive into the [Way of the Exile](#).

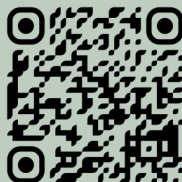
Overview

Enduring Word - Daniel 1:1-21



Text commentary, written materials, and audio/video recordings over [Daniel 1:1-21](#).

Got Questions - Daniel



Biblical Q&A, articles, translations, audios, videos, apps, podcasts and more on [Daniel](#).

Expand

Bible Reference - Daniel 1



Explore chapter and verse commentaries to deepen your understanding of [Daniel 1:1-21](#).

Bible Hub - Daniel 1:1-21



Parallel translations, language tools, commentaries, and much more on [Daniel 1:1-21](#).

Deepen

Logos Factbook - Daniel



Logos Factbook shares information resources and articles about [Daniel](#).

Blue Letter Bible - Daniel 1



Original texts, Translations, Cross-Refs, Commentaries, Dictionaries + more on [Daniel 1](#).

