

LESSON ONE  
*Daniel and  
His Friends:*  
OPTING FOR  
FAITHFULNESS

**FOCAL TEXT**

Daniel 1

**BACKGROUND**

Daniel 1

**MAIN IDEA**

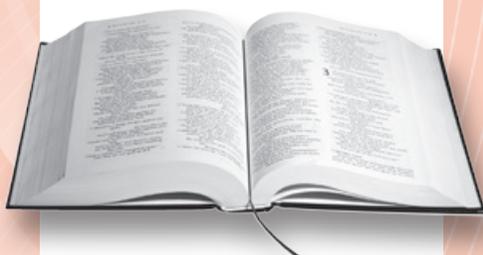
Daniel and his friends chose to demonstrate their faithfulness to God rather than accept the tempting offer extended by the Babylonian Empire.

**QUESTION TO EXPLORE**

How much should we go along to get along?

**TEACHING AIM**

To lead adults to evaluate how readily they go along with situations around them instead of demonstrating faithfulness to God



## BIBLE COMMENTS

### Understanding the Context

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Life is all about choices. Some choices may seem insignificant, while others carry with them eternal consequences. The sequence of these lessons in the study entitled *Guidance for the Seasons of Life* follows the various stages of adult life, from young adult to senior adult and all stages in-between. These Old Testament men and women faced significant choices, which affected not only them, but also those around them—family and friends, as well as foes.

This first lesson recounts the choices of a young man and his friends thrown into circumstances not of their own making. Each one had to respond and react to the issues he faced. The Book of Daniel is one of the most familiar, yet most misunderstood, books in the Old Testament. Many believers learn about *Daniel in the lions' den* when they are children, because this powerful event is easy to understand. Other passages confound even the most able scholars because of the symbolism, dreams, and visions contained in other chapters.

This first lesson begins the timeline of adult life, describing the challenges and temptations that confront young adults. Daniel lived during the period of the exile (597–539 B.C.). You will find him listed on the chart, “Overview of Old Testament People and Events,” in the *Adult Bible Study Guide* for this study. The biblical account does not record his exact age, but identifies him as a “youth” (Daniel 1:4).<sup>1</sup> Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were probably in their late teens or early twenties. These young men lived during a time of crisis. The Babylonian ruler, Nebuchadnezzar, had exiled many Jews, separating them from their families and homeland. Yet, the hand of God was evident, even in these dark days. The choices Daniel and his friends made when facing difficult circumstances can encourage all believers to remain faithful to God.

## Interpreting the Scriptures

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### A Short-Lived Rebellion (1:1–2)

**1:1.** In the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign as king of Judah, he formed an alliance with Egypt, hoping to gain an advantage over the emerging Babylonian empire. His plan was ill-conceived, causing Nebuchadnezzar to respond by attacking Jerusalem.

**1:2.** The king himself was brought to Babylon, along with sacred vessels from the temple. This first deportation included Daniel (605 B.C.). A second exile (597 B.C.) included Ezekiel. A third deportation occurred in 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple. The content of 2 Chronicles 36:5–8 may lend support to the idea that Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon and then released and allowed to return to Jerusalem after assuring Nebuchadnezzar of his loyalty.

### A Short-lived Attempt to Assimilate (1:3–14)

**1:3–4.** Along with the temple vessels, Nebuchadnezzar had a group of young men brought to Babylon for the purpose of immersing them in Babylonian culture. Those chosen for training in royal service had to meet five qualifications. They had to: (1) be young; (2) be of royal or noble birth; (3) be physically fit; (4) be intellectually sharp; and (5) possess the poise and presence of mind to stand before the king. Assimilation was the purpose of this training: “. . . to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (Dan. 1:4). Nebuchadnezzar did not want to put these young men to work; he wanted to turn them into Babylonians.

**1:5–7.** The king’s method to *babylonianize* Daniel and his friends included a rich diet, a three-year educational curriculum, and a name change. These things, coupled with their unfamiliar surroundings, would result in four young men committed to the Babylonian way of life.

Daniel’s concern was based on spiritual considerations more than nutritional or physical issues. The king’s rich food was considered *unclean* by Jewish dietary laws. No doubt some of this food had been sacrificed to idols, making it an insult to God to eat it.

The three-year educational process was designed to ignore Jewish wisdom and to focus on Babylonian culture. This *brainwashing* would prepare these young men to serve the king as capable administrators and advisors.

The new names of the four young men honored the Babylonian gods. Daniel, which means *God is my judge*, was named Belteshazzar, which means *Bel protects his life*. Bel was the name of a Babylonian deity. Hananiah, which means *The Lord is gracious*, was named Shadrach, which means *The command of Aku*. Aku was another Babylonian deity. Mishael, meaning *Who is what God is?*, was given the name Meshach, meaning *Who is what Aku is?* Azariah, *The Lord has helped*, was renamed Abednego, meaning *servant of Nebo*, referring to yet another Babylonian deity. This carefully thought-out process of assimilation had proven successful with other people groups defeated by the Babylonians. When successful, it minimized the risk of open rebellion and supported the Babylonian goal of conquering the world.

**1:8.** This is a life-changing verse. The Babylonians could take Daniel away from his home, put different food on the table, change his major in school, and change his name. However, they could not change his heartfelt commitment to God. His rebellion was subtle. He worked within the circumstances he faced, seeking permission to adjust the dietary requirement, while submitting to all the other requirements of his captors.

**1:9–14.** After failing to convince the chief commander of the officials to allow the change of diet (1:9–10), Daniel approached their immediate supervisor and proposed a ten-day test, where Daniel and his friends would be given vegetables and water. This ten-day test would determine what they would do for the next three years.

### The Everlasting Results of Commitment (1:15–21)

**1:15–17.** The ten-day test resulted in Daniel and his friends looking not only fine, but better than the rest. So the official allowed them to continue their diet of vegetables and water. That these young men were deemed “fatter” most likely refers to their healthier countenance. They appeared better nourished because they *were* better nourished and because God’s hand was on them. The results were dramatic. The overseer suspended

their prescribed diet of rich food and wine and allowed these young men to continue with their preferred food.

God not only honored their commitment but also gave them unusual abilities and gifts. They excelled in their studies of Babylonian literature and customs. Daniel also could interpret dreams and visions. This ability would play a significant role in Daniel's life in the years to come (Nine of the twelve chapters contained in the Book of Daniel revolve around dreams or visions and their interpretation).

**1:18–20.** Here the text fast-forwards three years. The king interviewed all who had gone through the period of training. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah passed this final exam with flying colors. In fact, the king determined these four young Jews were “ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm” (1:20). Consequently, they all entered the king's service, placing them in positions of opportunity and influence.

**1:21.** “And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.” Daniel is one of only a few men and women found in the Bible about whom nothing negative is written. Daniel's life defies the false notion that all young adults must *sow their wild oats*. God rewarded Daniel's commitment and faithfulness by giving him many years of life. Daniel lived throughout the entire Babylonian captivity and even survived to witness the downfall of Babylon at the hands of the Persian ruler, Cyrus, in 539 B.C.

### Focusing on the Meaning

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In light of Daniel's experience, what can young adults—and adults of any age—learn when faced with tough circumstances and significant choices?

*Remember, you are not alone.* Daniel faced uncertain times with friends by his side. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced the ultimate test of the fiery furnace (Dan. 3) together. Then, even though Daniel was thrown into the den of lions (Dan. 6), the very presence of God sustained him (as did the appearance of a “fourth” man to encourage and to save the young men in the furnace, Dan. 3:25).

*Remember, choices carry consequences.* Daniel did not choose a life of exile in Babylon, but the choices he made after his exile made a crucial difference in his future and the quality of his life. Young adult men and women live in a culture today not that much different than ancient Babylon. Turning away from what is right is easy. Young adults need to remember that even the seemingly insignificant decisions can make life better or worse.

The church must take an active role in helping young adults who live in a world where many walk away from their faith. How can the church help young adults during this stressful, challenging time in their lives?

*Cultivate authentic relationships.* The church must engage young adults by helping to develop authentic relationships between younger and older adult believers. Competing religions offer young adults a cafeteria-style approach to spirituality. Older, more seasoned believers can help younger adults to choose what is best.

*Encourage a sense of calling.* Just as Daniel and his friends understood their circumstances as an opportunity to do God's will, so young adult men and women should be encouraged to see their place in life in light of God's greater purposes. There is no better place to gain this divine perspective than one's congregation.

*Let young adults lead.* The church needs the leadership and input of its young adults. Too often, congregations place age limits on places of leadership that prevent gifted and competent younger adult men and women from ever finding their place in their church. The church must strike a balance between pushing too soon and waiting too late to bring young adults into its leadership structure.

God depended on the commitment of young adults in Babylon to set the example, stay the course, and lead the people in days of uncertainty and confusion. God still depends on and equips young adults to lead and encourage believers today.

## TEACHING PLANS

### Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

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#### Connect with Life

1. Write the phrase “Go Along to Get Along” on a marker board or poster board. As your class gathers, ask them to explain the meaning of the phrase and to offer examples of situations in which they have either witnessed the *go along* behavior in others or they have *gone along to get along* personally.

#### Guide Bible Study

2. Say: *We are often presented the opportunity to compromise our standards or values in order to just get along with others. Some of us have a personality that likes to please others, while others do not care whether we please others. The Book of Daniel offers us some principles and encouragement to live differently. Today we are going to study Daniel 1 and look for ways we can change things about ourselves that are not healthy in relating to others.*
3. Promote thoughtful discussion in the following way: Enlist a volunteer to come to the marker board or poster board and serve as a scribe for the group. Say: *Let’s look for clues about how God interacts with us in our world by looking at Daniel 1:1–10. As I read the passage, let’s look for ways you see God working.* Read the passage aloud, and afterward have learners call out the ways they see God at work. The scribe should record what he or she hears, and as teacher make sure to highlight God’s control of the situation in verses 2 and 9.
4. For further discussion, ask the following open-ended questions:
  - a. Nebuchadnezzar took the temple treasures, as well as the brightest of the nation’s youth. Which do you think was the more substantial loss? Why?

- b. Why would Nebuchadnezzar want the brightest and best of Judah to learn the literature and language of the Chaldeans?
  - c. The palace master gave new names to Daniel and his friends. What might have been the purpose of that?
5. Next, enlist someone to read aloud Daniel 1:11–21. Then say: *Let's discuss Daniel's bargain and the obviously positive outcome. Ask: Do you see Daniel's tactics as compromise, political maneuvering, a meaningful meeting in the middle, or something else? What is your opinion of Daniel's tactics? What do his tactics say about his faith in God? his loyalty to his values?*

### Encourage Application

6. Refer to the case study about Charlie in the *Study Guide*. Take a few minutes to read the case aloud, and then break into groups of three or four people each. Encourage the small groups to answer and discuss the questions posed by the case. Let them know they'll be reporting their answers to look for similarities and differences from other groups.
7. At the end of discussion close with a prayer that asks God to help each person rely on his or her values and faith in God, and for strength to avoid the *go along to get along* way of living.

### Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

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#### Connect with Life

1. Welcome class members by telling about a time when you or someone you know was pressured to do something. Make the transition to Bible study by saying, *This lesson is about how Daniel and his friends, when under difficulty, stuck to their religious values and experienced a good outcome.*

## Guide Bible Study

2. Display the following outline from the *Study Guide* on a marker board, flip chart, or handout:
  - a. Judah's Treasures Taken to Babylon (Dan. 1:1–5)
  - b. Daniel's Character (Dan. 1:6–10)
  - c. The Bargain (Dan. 1:11–14)
  - d. The Outcome (Dan. 1:15–21)
3. Read Daniel 1:1–5 aloud, or identify a volunteer to do so. Explain that Nebuchadnezzar aimed to take the very best of each nation he pillaged and strengthen his empire. Not only did he take the temple treasures, but he also took the brightest and best of the young Israelites into training in order to serve his court. Ask: *What advantages do you see in Nebuchadnezzar's strategy? What disadvantages existed? How did it affect Judah? How did it affect Daniel and his friends?* Summarize that it was a smart move in that it promoted a peaceful unity in the conquered nations, but it placed Daniel and his friends in a position of compromise.
4. Read Daniel 1:6–10 aloud or identify another volunteer to do so. Explain that in this section of Scripture Daniel and his friends were grouped with those whom the palace master considered the handsome, physically flawless, wise, knowledgeable, insightful, and competent. Explain that Daniel had resolved that he would not defile himself by eating food forbidden by Jewish dietary laws. Point out that in verse 9 that the Bible tells us that Daniel was allowed to find favor with the palace master because of God's design. The same thing is said in verse 2 of Nebuchadnezzar's overthrow of Judah. Ask: *What does this tell us about God's interaction in Daniel's life? in the life of Judah? How might that inform how we look for God's interaction in the world in which we live?*
5. Read Daniel 1:11–14 aloud or identify a volunteer to do so. Explain that Daniel offered a bargain to the palace master: test my diet, and you will see that it works. If not, "deal with your servants according to what you observe" (Dan. 1:13, NRSV). Ask: *What was the palace master most concerned about? How did this work to Daniel's*

*advantage? What does this bargain tell us about the rapport between Daniel and the palace master?*

### Encourage Application

6. Read Daniel 1:15–21 aloud or identify another volunteer to do so. Explain that Daniel and his friends looked better than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. This secured Daniel’s ability to stay on his customary diet and continue to honor God. As a response, God gave the four young men special skills and knowledge, and to Daniel was given the ability to interpret dreams. Ask: *Nebuchadnezzar found these young men “ten times better” (Dan. 1:20) than all the others. What was the result of Daniel’s refusal to “go along to get along”? What is the correlation between God’s blessing and the king’s observation of their skills?*
7. Refer the members to the questions in the *Study Guide*. As time permits, lead the group to discuss answers as a conclusion to the class session.

### NOTES

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–2, 4–6, 8, and 10–13 are taken from the New American Standard Bible® (1995 update).