



1

Daniel Obey's God

Key Theme

- God rewards faith and obedience.

Key Passages

- Daniel 1:1–21; John 16:33

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify how the four young men obeyed God.
- Describe how God blessed the four young men.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students work on the Memory Verse Review Sheet, either by themselves or with a partner.

- Write on the board, "What is blasphemy?"
- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Studying God's Word

The king of Babylon was hoping to brainwash Daniel and his three young friends. Brought as captives from Judah, he wanted them to forget their home, their customs, their God, and serve him! The four young men refused to eat the rich foods sacrificed to idols and instead asked to eat only vegetables and water. God blessed their obedience to Him and rewarded them with favor, knowledge, and wisdom.

- Go Before the Throne.
- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



Activity: What's in a Name?

You will discuss the use of God's name within the names of the four Hebrew boys and discuss the idea of blaspheming God's name in other phrases.

- Student Guides
- Pencils
- What's in a Name Answer Key



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

Nebuchadnezzar overthrew King Jehoiakim of Judah and carried him in chains with articles from the Temple in Jerusalem—from the house of God—to Babylon in 607 BC (2 Chronicles 36:5–8). Nebuchadnezzar then ordered that young Jewish men be trained “in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand” (Daniel 1:4), to serve the king of Babylon in his palace. Daniel was one of these young men—ripped from a privileged life as the son of a nobleman in Judah (Daniel 1:3–4).

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of those whom Nebuchadnezzar brought from Judah to serve in his court. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to train the Jewish captives in the Babylonian language and customs for three years to prepare them to serve him. Nebuchadnezzar was set on brainwashing these bright young Jewish men to forget their godly heritage.

Part of the brainwashing plan was to change the names of the captives. The four men mentioned above were no exception. Their Hebrew names giving honor to God were changed in order to give honor to the false gods of the land. Their names were changed as follows. Daniel means “God is my judge.” His name was changed to Belteshazzar, which means “Bel [chief god] protect the king.” Hananiah means “God is gracious.” His name was changed to Shadrach, which means “inspired of Aku [moon god].” Mishael means “who is like God?” His name was changed to Meshach, which means “who is like Aku?” Azariah means “God has helped.” His new name, Abed-Nego, means “servant of Nego (or Nebo) [the god of wisdom].” All of these changes were made in an attempt to remove their allegiance from the true God.

As future members of the court, these four young men, likely in their teens, were offered the fine delicacies of the king’s table. But “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” with the food and wine offered by the king (Daniel 1:8). As a Jew, he was called to honor God’s dietary laws as given to Moses. Daniel and the others were likely offered food that had been dedicated to false gods and that was prohibited by God (Leviticus 11—pork, shellfish, etc.). To eat this food would be to compromise and blend the worship of false gods with the one true God. Daniel and his friends refused to compromise, even knowing it could bring them trouble with the king. The chief of the eunuchs, though, was not keen on the idea of changing up the menu, for if the men got weak and weary, he would be to blame (Daniel 1:9–10).

Daniel presented a challenge to the steward: he and his friends would only eat vegetables and drink water for 10 days, and then their health would be evaluated. At the end of the 10 days, Daniel and his friends appeared better and fatter than the young men who had eaten from the king’s table. God had blessed their commitment to honor Him, and they were allowed to continue to eat their diet of vegetables. God also gave them knowledge and skill and wisdom. Daniel, in particular, was able to understand visions and dreams. This gift of interpreting would play an important part in Daniel’s ministry to God, Nebuchadnezzar, and other leaders (See Daniel chapters 2, 4, and 5).

After the three years of training, there were none like Daniel and his three friends. They excelled in wisdom and understanding. In fact, the Bible says they were 10 times better than the others. Each of the men served the king, and all were appointed to posts as governors, with Daniel serving the king directly as an advisor (Daniel 2:48–49).

God rewarded the obedience of Daniel, Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah. God preserved their lives and prospered them. They would face other tests in the future, including tribulation, trials, imprisonment, and

persecution. But they would continue to reveal the same conviction to honor and obey God. This is the attitude that all true followers of Jesus Christ should have.

In our culture today, many people have the misconception that becoming a Christian will bring an end to their trials. But our Lord Jesus made it clear that we will have tribulations in this world, but He has overcome the world, a truth that gives us peace (John 16:33). The tribulations we face in our culture may not be severe persecution for our faith like Daniel and his friends suffered. But if we are truly followers of Christ, trials and tribulation will enter into our lives (John 15:20; 2 Timothy 3:12). And as they do, we need to remember that Jesus said to expect the trials, be obedient through them, and trust God. Remember that Jesus Christ, by His Resurrection from the dead, has overcome this world and all of its trouble.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Daniel is an intriguing figure. As a teenager, he found himself taken captive by a foreign king and put into a training program aimed at brainwashing him to be a loyal Babylonian. You might imagine being whisked away to Moscow in the 1960s and placed in a concrete building for three years of training in communist philosophy in order to be put in place as an advisor to the government officials. That is similar to what Daniel and his friends faced. To stand uncompromisingly on God's commands at a time like that would require true faith, not a minimal commitment equivalent to showing up at church every once in a while. Daniel's faith in God was evident even though he had been kidnapped, forced to serve a pagan king, and given a name that honored a false god. It is only by such faith that any believer can serve God in the face of trials.

Because of Daniel's integrity and servanthood, he found such favor that he endured through many kings

and likely lived into his 80s. His service extended to the time of King Cyrus who would finally announce the end of the 70 years of Judah's captivity in 537 BC. In fact, Daniel likely witnessed the first Jews returning to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–3).

The book of Daniel contains historical accounts of the events in Babylon. It also includes many prophecies about the Gentile rulers of the Middle East over the next 500 years. Further careful study of the book of Daniel and these prophecies will provide confirmation of the supernatural accuracy of the Bible.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear sovereign Lord, you never change. I praise you and am comforted by that. I know that this lesson records events that happened long ago, in a land far away, but it rings true for me today in so many ways. Like Nebuchadnezzar, the enemy would love to brainwash me with the culture I'm living in. A rich diet is placed before me every day. It consists of more than forbidden food. Everything that would poison my soul is readily available to me and my students. But as long as our gaze is fixed on you, we can have the courage to say no to temptation like Daniel did. Holy Spirit, guard our minds from the brainwashing that is all around us that would make us doubt your Word and be unfaithful. Help us trust you in times of trials. I know that you will reward our faithfulness. Bring these heroes of the faith to life through this lesson, so that we are all inspired to trust you in trials, stand firm amid temptation, and be fully surrendered to you as they were.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Come On In

- Write on the board, “What is blasphemy?”
- Students work on the Memory Verse Review Sheet, either by themselves or with a partner.



Review

Refer to the *History of Israel* poster to review the events covered in the last three quarters.

Let’s start with a short review of where we are in history. The Exodus in 1491 BC brought the Children of Israel into the wilderness wandering for 40 years. After that, they entered the Promised Land and were ruled by Joshua and the elders. Then came the period of the judges—continuing for about three hundred years.

? Who can give a 5–10-word description of the period of the judges? *“Everyone did what was right in their own eyes” or “a series of obedience/rebellion/repentance.”*

After that, the people rebelled against God by demanding a king. Saul ruled first, followed by David and then Solomon. During this period, the tribes of Israel were united. That unity ended after the death of Solomon as Rehoboam ruled Judah in the south and Jeroboam ruled Israel in the north.

? Which of these kingdoms did God promise to carry on forever? *The Throne of David was to continue forever, so God’s promise was maintained through the kings of Judah, culminating in King Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.*

Israel, in the north, was ruled by a series of evil kings and was captured and destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 BC, with most of the survivors being carried away and the land resettled. All of this happened as a result of

the unrepentant idolatry of the kings and people of Israel.

Judah had a mix of good kings and bad kings, but they continued in idolatry as well. God eventually brought judgment to Judah at the hands of the Babylonians beginning in 607 BC and culminating with the destruction of Jerusalem in 588 BC. But God gave the captives hope of restoration through the words of Jeremiah: the captivity would only last 70 years.

Briefly review the Seven C’s of History as the big-picture framework of all of history.

In all of this messy rebellion and idolatry, God was working to bring about the redemption of humanity—the redemption He promised after the Fall. All of these events are pointing us forward to the coming of Jesus. We have seen this scarlet thread weaving throughout the history of the world from Creation to Corruption to Catastrophe and Confusion, and we are coming closer to the birth of Christ who will die on the Cross, with our ultimate gaze set on the Consummation of all things and the joy of being with Christ for eternity.

Our next four lessons will keep us in the period of the captivity, and then we will look at the period of restoration and silence leading up to the arrival of the Messiah.





Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

As we mentioned in a previous lesson, Daniel was one of the captives carried away to Babylon. Let's read Daniel 1:1–16 together and try to understand how Daniel and the other three young men with him responded to their situation. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

► Write on the board, "What is blasphemy?"

Daniel 1:1–16

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? Which phase of the captivity is described in the opening verses? *The first phase in 607 BC is in view.*
- ? How was Jehoiakim conquered by Nebuchadnezzar? *The Lord gave him into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.*
- ? What three words are used as synonyms for the land and culture of the captivity? *Babylon in verse 1; Shinar in verse 2; Chaldeans in verse 4.*
- ? How were the young men selected from among the captives to serve the king? *They were to be handsome, wise, quick learners, and able to serve well. These were picked for their potential value to serve the king as advisors and in other important positions.*
- ? What was to be done to the young men? *They were to be trained for three years in the language, literature, and culture of the Chaldeans in order that they may serve Babylon rather than Judah.*
- ? What was their source of food and provision? *They were cared for in the king's household, eating from his table.*
- ? What is the likely motive for offering them food from the king's table? *These young men would have their appetites for good food met by the king and look favorably upon his kind provision. This was surely part of the plan to acculturate or brainwash the captives.*
- ? Who was to care for the young men? *Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs, was put in charge of them. At your discretion, you may wish to share that it was very likely that these young men were castrated as part of the household of the eunuchs under the care of the master of the eunuchs.*
- ? Which group did the four young men mentioned in verse 6 belong to? *The sons of Judah is a reference to the nobility of these four young men. They were connected in some way to the royal household of Judah.*
- ? What happened to their names? *They were changed to Babylonian names.*

This change of names was another part of the brainwashing and attempt at converting them to the Babylonian culture. Their names were changed as follows. Daniel means "God is my judge." His name was changed to Belteshazzar, which means "Bel [chief god] protect the king." Hananiah means "God is gracious." His name was changed to Shadrach, which

means “inspired of Aku [moon god].” *Misrael* means “who is like God.” His name was changed to Meshach, which means “who is like Aku.” *Azariah* means “God has helped.” His new name, *Abed-Nego*, means “servant of Nabu [the god of wisdom].” All of these changes were made in an attempt to remove their allegiance to the true God. We will talk about the names more in a few minutes.

- ? **What was Daniel’s objection to the food offered to them?** *He refused the food, knowing that it would defile him. These men adhered to the Jewish dietary laws and knew that this food had all been offered to the false gods of Babylon before it was delivered to the tables.*
- ? **What did Daniel request of Ashpenaz?** *That they be allowed to eat only vegetables and drink only water so that they would not be defiled.*
- ? **Why did Ashpenaz fear allowing this change in diet?** *He could lose his head if the king was displeased with the outcome.*
- ? **What influenced Ashpenaz’s decision?** *God had given Daniel favor and goodwill in the eyes of Ashpenaz.*
- ? **What was the result after the ten days of testing?** *Their features appeared better than the other young men who had been eating the delicacies, and they were fatter in flesh.*

Discover the Truth

In essence, the Babylonians were seeking to brainwash the best and brightest of the Jews they had taken captive. They wished to turn them from their loyalty to God and their former nation and call them to serve as Babylonians. And what teenager wouldn’t love to eat the rich delicacies of the king’s table—and lots of it? There was a concerted effort to change the affections of these young men, turning them away from their God and nation.

- ? **Does this mean that a vegetarian diet is healthier than what the king was offering?** *No, that is a conclusion that cannot be drawn from this text. The text does not point to the diet as the source of health, but to God.*

God blessed Daniel and the others who chose, in the face of a death sentence for themselves and Ashpenaz, to honor God above a pagan king. They trusted in God’s character. This account should draw us to look at what God accomplishes and not at what we can accomplish.

- ? **What attributes of God did Daniel rightly understand as he stood up to the king’s defiling demands?** *Sovereign, holy, love, immutable, faithful.*

God is faithful and sovereign, and Daniel knew that. He was willing to honor God by refusing the defiling effects of the king’s food. He trusted the outcome to God’s plan. Here we can see an example of faith that is worthy of imitating, but we don’t want to simply “dare to be like Daniel”—we want to be like Daniel and fully trust in God, knowing that we can trust His character as it is faithfully revealed to us in His Word, including this example. Today, we have the Spirit within us to empower our obedience and trust in God’s character.

FAITHFUL
SOVEREIGN

? If you wanted to lose weight, would following the diet plan of Daniel—eating only vegetables and drinking water—be the biblical approach? No. Some have tried to turn this passage into an appeal for a way to have a healthy diet and lose weight. (The Daniel Plan is a popular diet program promoted by Rick Warren and there have been other similar diets drawn from this account and others.) If you plan to use a vegetarian diet to lose weight, you shouldn't look to this passage as a proof text. In fact, if you claim this passage as a dieting program you should expect to become "fatter in flesh" as a result. We need to handle God's Word accurately and not twist its ideas to support our own.



What's in a Name?

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- What's in a Name Answer Key
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

I want to stop for a moment and think about the renaming of the four young Hebrew men. As I mentioned a minute ago, each of the names of the young men was changed from a name that honored God to one that honored a false god.

Find the What's In a Name activity in your Student Guides. Work with a partner on answering the questions, and we'll discuss it in a few minutes. Walk around the classroom, helping any groups that need it.

Consider bringing in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia (or use one of the online resources) to show the students how to look up words and understand their meanings.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

The names that you have listed might be familiar to you, but do you know what they mean? Unless you have studied Hebrew,

probably not. Or, you might be able to find them in a concordance or in the study notes or margin notes of your Bible. But there are many great resources that can help you understand these names.

BibleGateway.com and BlueLetterBible.org are resources where online Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias can be found for free. Answers in Genesis does not endorse every resource found on these sites.

Use the What's in a Name Answer Key to go over each of the questions in the activity.

God's names define His character. When we defame His name, we defame His character. If we, as His ambassadors and children, act or speak in a way that is contrary to the way He calls us to act and speak, we are defaming God's character. Daniel understood this idea well, and His example is one that we can surely look to as encouragement. God empowered Daniel and the others to stand for His righteous character, and the character of the God of Israel was put on display. Daniel, despite his newly-given name, was not willing to blaspheme the name of his God for the pleasures of the king's table.



READ THE WORD

Daniel 1:17–21

Now that we have examined the trial set before the young Hebrew men and their response to it, let's look at God's response to the situation. Will someone please read Daniel 1:17–21? *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **How did God respond to the obedience of the four young men?** *God gave them knowledge and skill in literature and wisdom as they studied for the king's court. To Daniel, God gave wisdom in interpreting dreams and visions.*
- ? **What is "the end of the days" referring to?** *The end of the three years of training mentioned in verse 5.*
- ? **How did the four do as they were tested by Nebuchadnezzar?** *They were found ten times wiser than all of the wise men of the realm.*
- ? **How can we account for this dramatic difference?** *God blessed them as they trained so that they would be placed in positions of authority.*
- ? **Does the text say that God blessed them in this instance because of their obedience?** *No, but it is a very reasonable inference to say that God blessed them because of their obedience to Him.*

Discover the Truth

Just as God had given them favor in the eyes of the chief eunuch, God blessed these young men with amazing wisdom and knowledge as they studied for the three years in the king's court. God was pleased to grant them favor in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar so that he would place them in positions of power. We will see how these positions of power come into play in future lessons.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Imagine being ripped from a royal court, carried to the court of the nation that just conquered you, and then standing up to the king rather than violating your conscience before God. That is what Daniel and the others faced, but they did not face it alone. The God of Israel was not a local deity like those worshipped in the regions around Israel. He created the world and put those rulers in their positions of power. Daniel, Mishael, Azariah, and Hananiah were faithful to God, and God honored them for their faithfulness.

As God was directing the events, He brought these four young men into a serious trial where they had the choice to serve Him or serve the king. Jesus talked with His disciples, telling them that they would have tribulations in the world as they sought to serve God. As Christians, we also must choose to stay faithful to God in the face of various trials.

Listen to the words of Jesus in John 16:31–33, words delivered to the disciples in the upper room on the night of Jesus’s arrest:

Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

John 16:31–33

We have been guaranteed that we will face trials in this life—just like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. But Jesus tells us to have peace because He has overcome the world. Daniel didn’t need to fear what the king would do to him because he trusted God. We do not need to fear what the world will do to us because we have trust in Christ. We should not let trials surprise us—Jesus has promised us those problems will come. We can rest assured that Christ has overcome death, being resurrected and sitting at the right hand of God. Why should we fear what man can do to us when God is for us!?

GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? **How was God’s sovereignty over the affairs of kings and men demonstrated in the lesson text today?** *God had brought the captives to Babylon after sending Nebuchadnezzar to judge Judah. God had placed these four young men in the court of the king. God gave them favor in the eyes of Ashpenaz. God gave them wisdom and knowledge in their studies. God directed Nebuchadnezzar to set the young men in positions of authority.*
- ? **God surely blesses those who are obedient, but we find this isn’t always the case when we consider the whole counsel of God. What biblical examples can we use to show that God rewards obedience?** *Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are examples, as well as Job (in the end), Noah, Solomon, David, and many others.*
- ? **What biblical examples can we use to show that material blessings don’t necessarily come to those who obey God?** *Examples abound where obedience brought suffering: Jeremiah, Job, Paul, Peter, and all of the apostles. In the perfect case, Jesus obeyed God fully and was killed under cruel circumstances. We must be careful not to equate obedience with physical blessings, but be sure that spiritual blessings come to all who are obedient. Jesus plainly states that God calls the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45).*
- ? **How does our position in Christ help us to relate to the trials that God brings into our lives?** *Hebrews 12:5–13 talks of God bringing trials into our lives to grow us*

to be more like Christ. Romans 8:26–39 also speaks to facing trials in the strength of God the Holy Spirit, in the confidence of the faithfulness of the Father, and being changed into the image of Christ. Knowing that we are secure in Christ, we do not need to be afraid of trials, but embrace them as opportunities to grow in Christ-like character.

? **Would you pay money to go see a movie where the actors would regularly use your mother's or wife's name as a slur or curse?** *Pause to take responses.*

Do you allow the same to happen with the God who created you and saved you from your sin? *If we wouldn't endorse being entertained by slurs against our family members, why would we allow ourselves to be entertained by words or actions that are blasphemous? If we know that Jesus hung on the Cross to pay the penalty for the sin of blasphemy, we should not allow ourselves to be entertained by those things.*

? **We have talked about blasphemy in this lesson. How do we see blasphemy manifested in our own lives? In our culture?** *Discuss various answers.*

? **How could you use someone's name, or the meaning of their name, as an opening to share the gospel?** *Many people share names with people from the Bible, so these names could be used to ask people what they know about who Samuel was or what the name David means, and then use that as a springboard to ask them what they think about God.*



MEMORY VERSE

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His faithfulness to care for His children.
- Praise God for examples of faithfulness in His Word.
- Ask God for boldness to stand up for Christ as Daniel and the others did.