Sunday Morning Message

September 13, 2026

Living Life on Purpose

Series — The Book of Daniel

Text — Daniel Chapter 1

Congregational Reading — Daniel 1:5–8

Why Daniel — and Why Now?

We are studying the Book of Revelation on Sunday evenings. That book does not stand alone. Much of what John saw on the Isle of Patmos was first sketched in outline form six centuries earlier in the Book of Daniel. If Revelation is the destination, Daniel is one of the clearest road maps God ever gave His people.

There are two reasons this book belongs in this pulpit right now.

First, we are living in the last days. Daniel is a prophetic book. God used this captive Hebrew to pull back the curtain on "the latter days."

> *"But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." (Daniel 2:28)*

> *"Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days." (Daniel 10:14)*

Second, Daniel was written from exile. He was a believer living in a strange and godless land. That is not a bad description of the Christian life in 2026. We have not been marched to Babylon in chains, but we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Even in a nation that once owned a biblical heritage, the culture around us is moving farther from the God who blessed it. The question Daniel faced is the question we face: Will the world squeeze us into its mold, or will we live on purpose for the Lord?

> *"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20)*

> *"That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15)*

A Brief Word About the Book

Who wrote it, and when?

Conservative Bible believers have long held that Daniel himself wrote this book around 535 B.C., near the end of his long life in exile. Several passages are written in the first person (Daniel 8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:4–5). Liberal critics have always pushed the date down into the second century B.C. because the prophecies are too accurate for their comfort. They deny supernatural prediction, so they must invent a late author looking backward.

The greatest answer to that unbelief is the Lord Jesus Himself. Twice He called Daniel "Daniel the prophet."

> *"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)" (Matthew 24:15)*

If the Son of God called him a prophet, that settles the authorship and the date for those who take Jesus at His word. Sir Isaac Newton put it bluntly: "To reject Daniel is to reject the Christian religion."

What is the book about?

Daniel is a book about kingdoms — the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God. Warren Wiersbe helpfully traces six kingdoms through the book:

- Babylon — the head of gold (2:36–38) and the winged lion (7:4)
- Media-Persia — the arms and chest of silver (2:32, 39) and the bear (7:5)
- Greece — the thighs of brass (2:32, 39) and the leopard (7:6)
- Rome — the legs of iron (2:33, 40) and the dreadful beast (7:7)
- The kingdom of Antichrist — the ten toes (2:41–43) and the little horn (7:8)
- The kingdom of Christ — the smiting stone that fills the earth (2:34–35, 44–45) and the Ancient of Days (7:9–14)

Those same kingdoms will meet us again in Revelation. That is one reason these two books belong together.

J. Vernon McGee reminded us that about one-fourth of the Bible is prophecy. The great themes of prophecy — the Lord Jesus Christ, Israel, the Gentile nations, Satan, the man of sin, the Tribulation, the kingdom, and eternity — all fly toward one airport. Revelation is where they

land. Daniel is where many of them first take off. One important note: the church is never mentioned in the Old Testament, so you will not find the church in Daniel. That silence is itself a clue for how we read both books.

Who was the man?

The name Daniel means "God is my judge." We know more about Daniel than almost any other prophet because this book is largely his autobiography from the day he was taken captive. He was a teenager in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar first came to Jerusalem. He was still serving and still receiving visions when Cyrus released the captives around 536 B.C. He was free to go home. There is no record that the old man ever made the trip. God had planted him in the palace, and he stayed at his post.

Four words describe him, and they will preach through the whole book:

- **Purpose.** "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself…" (Daniel 1:8)
- **Prayer.** He knelt three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10).
- **Prophecy.** God showed him the rise and fall of empires, the seventy weeks, and the coming of Antichrist (Daniel 2, 7–12).
- **Politics — in the right sense.** God put him in high office under Babylonian and Persian kings so that a man of God could influence the kingdoms of men (Daniel 6:1–3).

> *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." (Proverbs 21:1)*

When the Constitutional Convention of 1787 seemed near failure, Benjamin Franklin said to George Washington, "I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth — that God governs in the affairs of men." The Book of Daniel is proof of that truth. The God of Daniel is still on the throne. He is still using men and women of purpose to influence a dark world.

The Setting of Chapter One (vv. 1–2)

> *"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into*

his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god." (Daniel 1:1–2)

Do not miss the little phrase in verse 2: "the Lord gave." Babylon did not sneak up on God. Judah's kings after Josiah had done evil. Jeremiah was preaching in Jerusalem while Daniel was being carried to Babylon. Jehoiakim was a wicked, covetous king who even cut up Jeremiah's scroll and burned it in the fire (Jeremiah 36). God was keeping His word. Captivity was not an accident. It was judgment — and, in Daniel's life, it was also a platform.

A short timeline will keep the story straight as we move through the book:

- 605 B.C. — First invasion. Daniel and his three friends taken. Chapter 1.
- 597 B.C. — Second deportation. Ezekiel taken.
- 586 B.C. — Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed.
- 539 B.C. — Belshazzar's feast. Babylon falls to the Persians. Chapter 5.
- 536 B.C. — Cyrus releases the captives. Daniel receives later visions. Chapter 10.

"Shinar" is the old name for the land of the two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates — the same region where Nimrod built Babel (Genesis 10:8–10). The vessels taken from the house of God will show up again in Daniel 5, when Belshazzar drinks from them and the handwriting appears on the wall. What men treat as trophies, God still owns.

I. Pressured to Conform to the Culture (vv. 3–7)

Nebuchadnezzar did not only take vessels. He took people — "the best of the best" from Judah. He wanted young men with no blemish, well favoured, skilful in wisdom, cunning in knowledge, understanding science, able to stand in a palace, and teachable in the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans (vv. 3–4). In other words, he wanted the cream of Judah's youth so he could turn them into Babylonians.

Watch the program. It is as old as Babel and as current as this week's headlines.

- Isolate them. Take them from home, from the Temple, from godly influence.
- Educate them. Three years of Chaldean learning, language, and worldview. The word "nourished" in verse 5 is bigger than food. It means to raise and develop. This was boot camp for the soul.
- Rename them. Change their identity.

- **Feed them.** Put the king's meat and the king's wine on the table — the best the empire could offer, and almost certainly meat that had been offered to idols.

The name changes were not cosmetic. They were theological:

- Daniel ("God is my Judge") became Belteshazzar ("Bel protect his life").
- Hananiah ("God has favoured") became Shadrach ("command of Aku," the moon god).
- Mishael ("Who is what God is") became Meshach ("Who is as Aku is").
- Azariah ("Jehovah has helped") became Abednego ("servant of Nebo").

Jehovah was stripped out of their names and the gods of Babylon were written in. Interestingly, Daniel is the only one of the four who is still known by his Hebrew name. The other three are remembered by their Chaldean names — Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Babylon got the labels. It never got the men.

That is still the pressure. The world does not usually begin by asking you to deny Christ out loud. It begins by renaming you, retraining you, and reseating you at its table. "Be like us. Think like us. Eat what we eat. Celebrate what we celebrate. Soften those old convictions. You will go farther if you do."

> *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:2)*

Every generation of believers must decide: Will I be conformed, or will I be a testimony? The culture is not neutral. Neither is the Christian life.

II. Purposed to Stand for Biblical Conviction (vv. 8–10)

> *"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (Daniel 1:8)*

A. The determination began in his heart.

"Purposed in his heart." That is the key sentence in the chapter, and one of the key sentences in the book. Before Daniel ever stood before a king, he had already settled something before God. Convictions are not manufactured in the crisis. They are formed in the heart when no one is watching, and then they show up when everyone is watching.

I cannot prove it from the text, but I believe Daniel had been marked by a godly home or a godly influence before the chains went on. Someone had already taught this teenager that there is a difference between the holy and the profane. When the test came, he did not have to call a committee meeting. He already knew.

A conviction is not the same thing as a preference. A preference is a choice that helps you keep a conviction. A conviction is a line drawn from Scripture that you will not cross because you believe God has spoken. Daniel's line was clear: he would not defile himself.

Why was the king's table such a big deal?

- The meat had almost certainly been offered to idols. To eat it was to participate, in some measure, in the worship of a false god.
- Much of it would have been unclean under the law God had given Israel (Leviticus 11).
- The wine may have been refused because of a conviction against intoxicating drink. "It is not for kings… to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink" (Proverbs 31:4). Some have wondered whether these young men lived under a Nazarite-type vow (Numbers 6).

We are not under Old Testament dietary law today (Acts 10:9–16; 1 Corinthians 8:8). Meat does not commend us to God. But the principle has not expired: there are tables a child of God will not sit at, and there are identifications a child of God will not make, because they defile the testimony and dull the conscience.

> *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)*

B. The determination showed up in his manner.

Notice what Daniel did not do. He did not stage a protest. He did not insult the prince of the eunuchs. He "requested." Verse 9 says God brought Daniel into favour and tender love with that official. Later the book will say that "an excellent spirit" was in him (Daniel 5:12; 6:3).

That is a word some of us need. Strong convictions do not require a sour spirit. You can refuse the king's meat and still be easy to work with. You can draw a line without drawing a crowd to look at how holy you are. Daniel was not haughty about his beliefs. People liked him, and because they liked him, they were forced to deal with his God.

Joseph is the same kind of picture in Genesis — a young man in a pagan court who would not defile himself, and who carried an excellent spirit while he did it. God still uses that combination: a clean heart and a gracious manner.

III. A Plan That Made Room for God to Work (vv. 11–16)

Daniel did not only say no. He offered a better way. He asked for a ten-day test: vegetables ("pulse") and water instead of the king's meat and wine. If they looked worse at the end of ten days, the overseer could do as he wished. If they looked better, the arrangement could continue.

> *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)*

That is not compromise of principle. That is wisdom in the application of principle. Daniel found the way of escape God had already built into the situation. The overseer wanted these young men to succeed. Daniel gave him a path that protected the official's life and protected Daniel's conscience.

At the end of ten days they looked healthier than all the others who ate the king's diet. Melzar let them continue. God had taken a quiet stand in a dining hall and turned it into a testimony.

None of what follows in this book happens if Daniel fails this first test. There were many Hebrew captives in Babylon. God used the ones who would not defile themselves — and who had the character to live out that purpose when the pressure was on.

IV. Promoted Because They Were Faithful (vv. 17–21)

> *"As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." (Daniel 1:17)*

Three years passed between the deportation and their first standing before Nebuchadnezzar. In those years God kept equipping them. Wiersbe said it well: if you want to make a living, get training; if you want to make a life, add education; but if you want a ministry for God, you must have divine gifts and divine help. Training is no substitute for what only God can give.

> *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)*

When the king examined them, they were ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in his realm (v. 20). Remember what those court advisors were. Magicians dealt in the occult. Enchanters used incantations. Sorcerers cast spells. Astrologers read the stars. All of that was forbidden by the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:9–13). Daniel and his friends had to work alongside that darkness without becoming part of it. They remained clean, and they outshone the entire system — not because Babylonian education was so fine, but because God gave them what the Chaldeans could not manufacture.

Verse 21 is almost a footnote, but it is a sermon by itself: "And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." From 605 to 539 B.C. — and Daniel 10:1 shows he was still receiving revelation after that — this man kept going. Empires changed. Kings died. The Temple fell and, in time, began to rise again. Daniel continued. The teenager who purposed in his heart became the old man who still belonged to God in a foreign court.

Faithfulness in little things is still the doorway to greater things. The young men who ate the king's meat never got this paragraph written about them. The four who stood for the Lord were the four who stood before the king.

Conclusion — Live Your Life on Purpose

The title of this message is not a slogan. It is the difference between a life that drifts with Babylon and a life that shines in Babylon. Daniel did not stumble into usefulness. He purposed. Then God did what only God can do.

If you belong to Christ this morning, purpose to live for Him.

1. Study to find out what God has said. Convictions are born in the Word, not in the mood of the moment.
2. Strengthen those convictions in daily time with God and in the preaching and teaching of the Word with the church. A conviction that is never fed will not survive the first real test.
3. Stand for truth in a world that is getting darker. You do not have to be loud to be clear. You do have to be settled.

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil… and having done all, to stand." (Ephesians 6:10–11, 13)