

Early Life of Daniel in Babylon

by John F. Walvoord

The book of Daniel is a historical account of the prophet Daniel's experiences in Babylon, highlighting his faithfulness and trust in God in the face of challenges and persecution.

Topics: "Daniel's Faith", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the historical setting and significance of the first chapter of Daniel, highlighting the faithfulness and wisdom of Daniel and his companions in Babylon. The chapter sets the tone for the book of Daniel, emphasizing Daniel's unique role as a governmental servant and faithful historian of God's dealings. Despite being classified as a prophet, Daniel's primary focus was on serving in the government and interpreting dreams and visions. The chapter showcases God's favor and blessing upon Daniel and his companions, demonstrating their superiority in wisdom and understanding compared to the wise men of Babylon.

Transcript

The first chapter of Daniel is a beautifully written, moving story of the early days of Daniel and his companions in Babylon. In brief and condensed form, it records the historical setting for the entire book. Moreover, it sets the tone as essentially the history of Daniel and his experiences in contrast to the prophetic approach of the other major prophets, who were divine spokesmen to Israel. In spite of being properly classified as a prophet, Daniel was in the main a governmental servant and a faithful historian of God's dealings with him. Although shorter than prophetic books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the book of Daniel is the most comprehensive and sweeping revelation recorded by any prophet of the Old Testament. The introductory chapter explains how Daniel was called, prepared, matured, and blessed of God. With the possible exceptions of Moses and Solomon, Daniel was the most learned man in the Old Testament and most thoroughly trained for his important role in history and literature.

The Captivity of Judah

1:1-2 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; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

The opening verses of Daniel succinctly give the historical setting which includes the first siege and capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. According to Daniel, this occurred "in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah," or approximately 605 b.c. Parallel accounts are found in 2 Kings 24:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 36:5-7. The capture of Jerusalem and the first deportation of the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon, including Daniel and his companions, were the fulfillment of many warnings from the prophets of Israel's coming disaster because of the nation's sins against God. Israel had forsaken the law and ignored God's covenant (Is 24:1-6). They had ignored the Sabbath day and the sabbatic year (Jer 34:12-22). The seventy years of the captivity were, in effect, God claiming the Sabbath, which Israel had violated, in order to give the land rest.

Israel had also gone into idolatry (1 Ki 11:5; 12:28; 16:31; 18:19; 2 Ki 21:3-5; 2 Ch 28:2-3), and they had been solemnly warned of God's coming judgment upon them because of their idolatry (Jer 7:24-- 8:3; 44:20-23). Because of their sin, the people of Israel, who had given themselves to idolatry, were carried off captive to Babylon, a center of idolatry and one of the most wicked cities in the ancient world. It is significant that after the Babylonian captivity, idolatry never again became a major temptation to Israel.

In keeping with their violation of the Law and their departure from the true worship of God, Israel had lapsed into terrible moral apostasy. Of this, all the prophets spoke again and again. Isaiah's opening message is typical of this theme song of the prophets: They were a "sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward... Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Is 1:4-6). Here again, the ironic judgment of God is that Israel, because of sin, was being carried off captive to wicked Babylon. The first capture of Jerusalem and the first captives were the beginning of the end for Jerusalem, which had been made magnificent by David and Solomon. When the Word of God is ignored and violated, divine judgment sooner or later is inevitable. The spiritual lessons embodied in the cold fact of the captivity may well be pondered by the church today, too often having a form of godliness but without knowing the power of it. Worldly saints do not capture the world but become instead the world's captives.

According to Daniel 1:1, the crucial siege and capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came "in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah." Critics have lost no time pointing out an apparent conflict between this and the statement of Jeremiah that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon was in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer 25:1). Montgomery, for instance, rejects the historicity of this datum.³⁶ This supposed chronological error is used as the first in a series of alleged proofs that Daniel is a spurious book written by one actually unfamiliar with the events of the captivity. There are, however, several good and satisfying explanations.

The simplest and most obvious explanation is that Daniel is here using Babylonian reckoning. It was customary for the Babylonians to consider the first year of a king's reign as the year of accession and to call the next year the first year. Keil and others brush this aside as having no precedent in Scripture.³⁷ Keil is, however, quite out of date with contemporary scholarship on this point. Jack Finegan, for instance, has demonstrated that the phrase the first year of Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah actually means "the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar"³⁸ of the Babylonian reckoning. Tadmor was among the first to support this solution, and the point may now be considered as well established.³⁹

What Keil ignores is that Daniel is a most unusual case because he of all the prophets was the only one thoroughly instructed in Babylonian culture and point of view. Having spent most of his life in Babylon, it is only natural that Daniel should use a Babylonian form of chronology. By contrast, Jeremiah would use Israel's form of reckoning which included a part of the year as the first year of Jehoiakim's reign. This simple explanation is both satisfying and adequate to explain the supposed discrepancy. However, there are other explanations.

Leupold, for instance, in consideration of the additional reference in 2 Kings 24:1 where Jehoiakim is said to submit to Nebuchadnezzar for three years, offers another interpretation. In a word, it is the assumption that there was an earlier raid on Jerusalem, not recorded elsewhere in the Bible, which is indicated in Daniel 1:1. Key to the chronology of events in this crucial period in Israel's history was the battle at Carchemish in May-June 605 B.C., a date well established by D. J. Wiseman.⁴⁰ There Nebuchadnezzar met Pharaoh Necho and destroyed the Egyptian army; this occurred "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (Jer 46:2). Leupold holds that the invasion of Daniel 1:1 took place prior to this battle, instead of immediately afterward. He points out that the usual assumption that Nebuchadnezzar could not have bypassed Carchemish to conquer Jerusalem first, on the theory that Carchemish was a stronghold which he could not ignore, is not actually supported by the facts, as there is no evidence that the Egyptian armies were in any strength at Carchemish until just before the battle that resulted in the showdown. In this case, the capture of Daniel would be a year earlier or about 606 b.c.⁴¹

In the present state of biblical chronology, however, this is too early. Both Finegan⁴² and Thiele,⁴³ present-day authorities on biblical chronology, accept the assumption that the accession-year system of dating was in use in Judah from Jehoash to Hoshea. Thiele resolves the discrepancy by assuming that Daniel used the old calendar year in Judah which began in the fall in the month Tishri (Sept.-Oct.) and that Jeremiah used the Babylonian calendar which began in the spring in the month Nisan (March-April). According to the Babylonian Chronicle, "Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of the Hatti country," an area that includes all of Syria and the territory south to the borders of Egypt, in the late spring or early summer of 605. This would be Jehoiakim's fourth year according to the Nisan reckoning and the third year according to the Tishri calendar.

Still a third view, also mentioned by Leupold,⁴⁴ offers the suggestion that the word came in Daniel 1:1 actually means "set out" rather than "arrived" and cites the following passages for similar usage (Gen 45:17; Num 32:6; 2 Ki 5:5; Jon 1:3). Keil, following Hengstenberg and others, also supports this explanation.⁴⁵ This argument, which hangs on the translation "set out" (for the Hebrew *bo'*), is weak, however, as the examples cited are indecisive. In verse 2, the same word is used in the normal meaning of "came."

Both of Leupold's explanations given as alternates are far less satisfactory than the method of harmonization offered by Finegan and Thiele. The probability is that Wiseman is right, that Daniel was carried off captive shortly after the capture of Jerusalem in the summer of 605 B.C. In any case, the evidence makes quite untenable the charge that the chronological information of Daniel is inaccurate. Rather, it is entirely in keeping with information available outside the Bible and supports the view that Daniel is a genuine book.

According to Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, described as "king of Babylon," besieged Jerusalem successfully. If this occurred before the battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar was not as yet king. The proleptic use of such a title is so common (e.g. in the statement "King David as a boy was a shepherd") that this does not

cause a serious problem. Daniel does record, however, the fact that Jehoiakim was subdued and that "part of the vessels of the house of God" were "carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god." "Shinar" is a term used for Babylon with the nuance of a place hostile to faith. It is associated with Nimrod (Gen 10:10), became the locale of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:2), and is the place to which wickedness is banished (Zee 5:11).

The expression he carried is best taken as referring only to the vessels and not to the deportation of captives. Critics, again, have found fault with this as an inaccuracy because nowhere else is it expressly said that Daniel and his companions were carried away at this time. The obvious answer is that mention of carrying off captives is unnecessary in the light of the context of the following verses, where it is discussed in detail. There was no need to mention it twice. Bringing the vessels to the house of Nebuchadnezzar's god Marduk⁴⁶ was a natural religious gesture, which would attribute the victory of the Babylonians over Israel to Babylonian deities. Later other vessels were added to the collection (2 Ch 36:18), and they all appeared on the fateful night of Belshazzar's feast in Daniel 5. Jehoiakim himself was not deported, later died, and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin. Jehoiakim, although harassed by bands of soldiers sent against him, was not successfully besieged (2 Ki 24:1-2).

Jewish Youths Selected for Training

1:3-7 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful, in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

In explanation of how Daniel and his companions found the way to Babylon, Daniel records that the king "spake unto Ashpenaz," better translated "told" or "commanded," to bring some of the children of Israel to Babylon for training to be servants of the king. The name Ashpenaz, according to Siegfried H. Horn, "appears in the Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur as 'SPNZ, and is probably attested in the Cuneiform records as Ashpazdnda." Horn goes on to identify him as, "the chief of King Nebuchadnezzar's eunuchs (Dan. 1:3)."⁴⁷ The significance of the name Ashpenaz has been much debated, but it seems best to agree with Young that "its etymology is uncertain."⁴⁸

It is probable that by eunuchs reference is made to important servants of the king, such as Potiphar (Gen 37:36), who was married. It is not stated that the Jewish youths were made actual eunuchs as Josephus assumes.⁴⁹ Isaiah had predicted this years before (Is 39:7), and Young supports the broader meaning of eunuch by the Targum rendering of the Isaiah passage which uses the word nobles for eunuchs.⁵⁰ However, because the word saris means both "court officer" and "castrate," scholars are divided on the question of whether both meanings are intended. Montgomery states, "It is not necessary to draw the conclusion that the youths were made eunuchs, as Jos. hints: 'Tie made some of them eunuchs,' nor to combine the ref. after Theodt., with the alleged fulfillment of Is 39:7."⁵¹ Charles writes in commenting on the description in Daniel 1:4, no blemish, "The perfection here asserted is physical, as in Lev. 21:17. Such perfection could not belong to eunuchs."⁵² All agree, however, that saris, translated "eunuch" in Isaiah

56:3, refers to a castrate. Ultimately the choice is left to the interpreter, although, as indicated above, some favor the thought of "court officer."

Those selected for royal service are described as being "the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes." The reference to the children of Israel does not mean that they were selected out of the Northern Kingdom which already had been carried off into captivity, but rather that the children selected were indeed Israelites, that is, descendants of Jacob. The stipulation, however, was that they should be of the king's seed, literally "of the seed of the kingdom," that is, of the royal family or of "the princes"--the nobility of Israel.

The Hebrew for the princes is a Persian word, *partemim*, which is cited as another proof for a late date of Daniel. However, inasmuch as Daniel lived in his latter years under Persian government as a high official, there is nothing strange about an occasional Persian word. As a matter of fact, it is not even clear that the word is strictly Persian, as its origin is uncertain.⁵³

In selecting these youths for education in the king's court in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was accomplishing several objectives. Those carried away captive could well serve as hostages to help keep the royal family of the kingdom of Judah in line. Their presence in the king's court also would be a pleasant reminder to the Babylonian king of his conquest and success in battle. Further, their careful training and preparation to be his servants might serve Nebuchadnezzar well in later administration of Jewish affairs.

The specifications for those selected are carefully itemized in verse 4. They were to have no physical blemish and were to be "well favoured," that is, "good ones in appearance." They were to be superior intellectually, that is, "skilful in all wisdom"; and their previous education, such as was afforded royal children or children of the nobility, was a factor. Their capacity to have understanding in "science" should not be taken in the modern sense, but rather as pertaining to their skill in all areas of learning of their day. In a word, their total physical, personal, and intellectual capacities as well as their cultural background were factors in the choice. Their training, however, was to separate them from their previous Jewish culture and environment and teach them "the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

The reference to Chaldeans may be to the Chaldean people as a whole or to a special class of learned men, as in Daniel 2:2, i.e., those designated as *kasdim*. The use of the same word for the nation as a whole and for a special class of learned men is confusing, but not necessarily unusual. The meaning here may include both: the general learning of the Chaldeans and specifically the learning of wise men, such as astrologers. It is most significant that the learning of the Chaldeans was of no help to Daniel and his companions when it came to the supreme test of interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Their age at the time of their training is not specified, but they were probably in their early teens.

Although an education such as this did not in itself violate the religious scruples of Jewish youths, their environment and circumstances soon presented some real challenges. Among these was the fact that they had a daily provision of food and wine from the king's table. Ancient literature contains many references to this practice. A. Leo Oppenheim lists deliveries of oil for the sustenance of dependents of the royal household in ancient literature and includes specific mention of food for the sons of the king of Judah in a tablet dating from the tenth to the thirty-fifth year of Nebuchadnezzar II.⁵⁴ Such food was "appointed," or "assigned, in the sense of numerical distribution."⁵⁵

The expression a daily provision in the Hebrew is literally "a portion of the day in its day." The word for "meat" (Heb. *pathbagh*), according to Leupold, "is a Persian loan word from the Sanscrit

pratibagha."⁵⁶Although it is debatable whether the word specifically means "delicacies," as Young considers that it means "assignment,"⁵⁷ the implication is certainly there that the royal food was lavish and properly called "rich food" (as in the RSV).⁵⁸

The bountiful provision of the king was intended to give them ample food supplies to enable them to pursue their education for a three-year period. The expression so nourish them three years literally refers to training such as would be given a child. The goal was to bring them to intellectual maturity to "stand before the king," equivalent to becoming his servant and thereby taking a place of responsibility.

In verse 6, Daniel and his three companions--Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah--are mentioned as being children of Judah included among the captives. These only of the captives are to figure in the narrative following, and no other names are given. The corrupting influences of Babylon were probably too much for the others, and they were useless in God's hands.

The name of Daniel is a familiar one in the Bible and is used of at least three other characters besides the prophet Daniel (1 Ch 3:1, a son of David; Ezra 8:2, a son of Ithamar; and in Neh 10:6, a priest). Conservative scholars, however, find a reference to the prophet Daniel in Ezekiel 14:14, 20; and Ezekiel 28:3. As pointed out in the Introduction, critics usually dispute the identification of Ezekiel's mention of Daniel as the same person as the author of the book as this would argue against their contention that the book of Daniel is a second century b.c. forgery. As noted previously, however, it would be most significant and natural for Ezekiel, a captive, to mention one of his own people who, though also a captive, had risen to a place of power second only to the king. Jewish captives would not only regard Daniel as their hero, but as a godly example. The contention of critics that Ezekiel is referring to a mythological character mentioned in the Ras Shamra Text (dated 1500-1200 b.c.) is, as Young states, "extremely questionable."⁵⁹

The change in the name of Daniel and his three companions focuses attention upon the meaning of both their Hebrew and Babylonian names.

Scholars are generally agreed that Daniel's name means "God is judge" or "my judge is God" or "God has judged." Hananiah, whose name also appears elsewhere in the Bible, referring to other individuals (1 Ch 25:23; 2 Ch 26:11; Jer 36:12; etc.) is interpreted as meaning "Jehovah is gracious" or "Jehovah has been gracious." Mishael (Ex 6:22; Neh 8:4) may be understood to mean "who is He that is God?"⁶⁰ or "who is what God is?"⁶¹ Azariah may be interpreted, "The Lord helps"⁶² or "Jehovah hath helped." All of the Hebrew names of Daniel's companions appear again in other books of the Old Testament in reference to others by the same name. Significantly, all of their Hebrew names indicate their relationship to the God of Israel, and in the customs of the time, connote devout parents. This perhaps explains why these, in contrast to the other young men, are found true to God: they had godly homes in their earlier years. Even in the days of Israel's apostasy, there were those who corresponded to Elijah's seven thousand in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal.

All four of the young men, however, are given new names as was customary when an individual entered a new situation (cf. Gen 17:5; 41:45; 2 Sa 12:24-25; 2 Ki 23:34; 24:17; Est 2:7).⁶³ The heathen names given to Daniel and his companions are not as easily interpreted as their Hebrew names, but probably they were given in a gesture to credit to the heathen gods of Babylon the victory over Israel and to further divorce these young men from their Hebrew background. Daniel is given the name of Belteshazzar, identical to Belshazzar and meaning "protect his life,"⁶⁴ or preferably "May Bel protect his life" (see Dan

4:8).⁶⁵ Bel was a god of Babylon (cf. Baal, the chief god of the Canaanites).

Hananiah was given the name of Shadrach. Leupold interprets this as being a reference to the compound of Sudur, meaning "command," and Aku, the moon-god. Hence the name would mean "command of Aku."⁶⁶ Young considers the name a perversion of Marduk, a principal god of Babylon.

Mishael is given the name of Meshach. Leupold considers this to be a contraction of Mi-sha-aku meaning, "who is what Aku (the moon-god) is?" Montgomery holds that the first part of Mishael means "salvation," following Schrader and Torrey but rejecting an alternate translation "who is what god is?" followed by most modern commentaries.⁶⁷ Montgomery is probably right, although Young does not feel the identification of this name is sufficient to give a definition.⁶⁸

Azariah is given the name of Abed-nego which probably means "servant of Nebo" with Nebo corrupted to nego. Keil does not venture an opinion on the meaning of Shadrach or Meshach, but agrees with the interpretation of Abed-nego.⁶⁹ Nebo was considered the son of the Babylonian god Bel.

Daniel, in his later writing, generally prefers his own Hebrew name, but frequently uses the Babylonian names of his companions. The fact that the Hebrew youths were given heathen names, however, does not indicate that they departed from the Hebrew faith any more than in the case of Joseph (Gen 41:45).

Daniel's Purpose Not to Defile Himself

1:8-10 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. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

Daniel and his companions were confronted with the problem of compromise in the matter of eating food provided by the king. No doubt, the provision for them of the king's food was intended to be generous and indicated the favor of the king. Daniel, however, "purposed in his heart" or literally, "laid upon his heart" not to defile himself (cf. Is 42:25; 47:7; 57:1, 11; Mal 2:2). The problem was twofold. First, the food provided did not meet the requirements of the Mosaic law in that it was not prepared according to regulations and may have included meat from forbidden animals. Second, there was no complete prohibition in the matter of drinking wine in the Law; but here the problem was that the wine, as well as the meat, had been dedicated to idols as was customary in Babylon. To partake thereof would be to recognize the idols as deities. A close parallel to Daniel's purpose not to defile himself is found in the book of Tobit (1:10-11, RSV) which refers to the exiles of the northern tribes: "When I was carried away captive to Nineveh, all my brethren and my relatives ate the food of the Gentiles: but I kept myself from eating it, because I remembered God with all my heart." A similar reference is found in 1 Maccabees (1:62-63, RSV), "But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die."⁷⁰

The problem of whether Daniel and his companions should eat the food provided by the king was a supreme test of their fidelity to the law and probably served the practical purpose of separating Daniel and his three companions from the other captives who apparently could compromise in this matter. His decision also demonstrates Daniel's understanding that God had brought Israel into captivity because of

their failure to observe the law. Daniel's handling of this problem sets the spiritual tone for the entire book.

Keil summarizes the problem in these words:

The command of the king, that the young men should be fed with the food and wine from the king's table, was to Daniel and his friends a test of their fidelity to the Lord and to His law, like that to which Joseph was subjected in Egypt, corresponding to the circumstances in which he was placed, of his fidelity to God (Gen. 39:7 f.). The partaking of the food brought to them from the king's table was to them contaminating, because forbidden by Law; not so much because the food was not prepared according to the Levitical ordinance, or perhaps consisted of the flesh of animals which to the Israelites were unclean, for in this case the youths were not under the necessity of refraining from the wine, but the reason of their rejection of it was that the heathen at their feasts offered up in sacrifice to their gods, a part of the food and the drink, and thus consecrated their meals by a religious rite; whereby not only he who participated in such a meal participated in the worship of idols, but the meat and the wine as a whole were the meat and the wine' of an idol sacrifice, partaking of which, according to the saying of the apostle (1 Cor. 10:20 f.), is the same as sacrificing to devils. Their abstaining from such food and drink betray no rigorism going beyond the Mosaic law, a tendency which first showed itself in the time of the Maccabees... Daniel's resolution to refrain from such unclean food flowed, therefore, from fidelity to the law, and from steadfastness to the faith that 'man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord' (Deut. 8:3).⁷¹

Daniel's handling of this difficult situation reflects his good judgment and common sense. Instead of inviting punishment by rebellion, he courteously requests of the prince of the eunuchs that he might be excused from eating food which would defile his conscience (1 Co 10:31). Although critics attempt to equate this abstinence with fanaticism and thereby link it to the Maccabean Period,⁷² there is no excuse for such a charge since Daniel handles the situation well. Leupold points out that Daniel did not object to the heathen names given to them nor to their education which involved the learning of the heathen, including their religious view.⁷³ This was not a direct conflict with the Jewish law. Here Daniel is exercising a proper conscience in matters that were of real importance.

When Daniel brought his request to the prince of the eunuchs, we are told that God had brought Daniel into favor and compassion with him. The King James Version implies that this predated his request. It is more probable that it occurred at the time the request was given, as brought out by the literal rendering of the Hebrew, "God gave Daniel favour" and so forth. As Young puts it, "The sequence of ideas is historical."⁷⁴ The word "favour" (Heb. *hesed*) means kindness or good will. The translation "tender love" (Heb. *rahami,m*) is a plural intended to denote deep sympathy. It is clear that God intervened on Daniel's part in preparing the way for his request.

The prince of eunuchs, however, was not speaking idly when he replied to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king," for indeed it was not an overstatement that, if he did not fulfill his role well, he might lose his head. Life was cheap in Babylon and subject to the whims of the king. The prince, therefore, did not want to be caught changing the king's orders in regard to the diet of the captives. If later they showed any ill effects and inquiry was made, he would have been held responsible. The expression "worse liking" (i.e., worse looking, poor in comparison) does not imply any dangerous illness but only difference of appearance, such as paleness or being thinner than his companions. Although the prince could have peremptorily denied Daniel's request, Ashpenaz attempted to explain the problem. This opened the door for a counterproposal.

Daniel's Request for a Ten-Day Test

1:11-14 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

Daniel's next step was to appeal to the steward who had immediate charge of Daniel and his companions for a ten-day test. Montgomery observes, "Dan. then appeals privately to a lower official, the 'warden,' as the Heb. word means, who was charged with the care of the youths and their diet... Tradition has rightly distinguished between this official and the Chief Eunuch."⁷⁵ The King James Version indicates this request is made to Melzar (Heb. Hamelsar). The probability is that this is not a proper name and simply means "the steward" or the chief attendant.⁷⁶ The Septuagint changes the text here to indicate that Daniel had actually spoken to "Abiezdrí who had been appointed chief eunuch over Daniel." Critics, such as Charles, have used this as a basis for questioning the text of Daniel with the idea that Daniel would not speak to the steward but would rather continue his conversation with the prince of eunuchs. Young, after Calvin, refutes this idea, however, and holds that Daniel's action is perfectly natural and in keeping with the situation.⁷⁷ Having been refused permission for a permanent change in diet, Daniel naturally took the next course of attempting a brief trial. As Montgomery says, "An underling might grant the boon without fear of discovery."⁷⁸ The chief steward, not being in as close or responsible a position as the prince of eunuchs in relation to the king, could afford to take a chance.

The proposal was to give a ten-day trial, a reasonable length of time to test a diet and yet one that would not entail too much risk of incurring the wrath of the king. The request to eat "pulse" or vegetables included a broad category of food. Young agrees with Driver that this did not limit the diet to peas and beans but to food that grows out of the ground, i.e., "the sown things."⁷⁹ Calvin may be right that Daniel had a special revelation from God in seeking this permission and for this reason the youth made the proposal that at the end of the ten days their countenance (or appearance) should be examined and judgment rendered accordingly.⁸⁰ The steward granted their request, and the test was begun.

Daniel's Request Granted

1:15-16 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

At the conclusion of the test, Daniel and his companions not only were better in appearance but also were fatter in flesh than those who had continued to eat the king's food. Although God's blessing was on them, it is not necessary to imagine any supernatural act of God here. The food they were eating was actually better for them. On the basis of the test their request was granted, and their vegetable diet continued.

God's Blessing on Daniel and His Companions

1:17-21 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. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and

Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

The closing section of Daniel 1 is a summary of the three years of hard study and the result of God's blessing upon the four faithful young men. The word children is better translated "youths." By the time they completed their education, they were probably nearly twenty years of age. In addition to their natural intellectual ability and their evident careful application to their studies, God added His grace. The article precedes the name of God, and by this is meant that He is the true God. By knowledge and skill (or intelligence) is indicated that they not only had a thorough acquaintance with the learning of the Chaldeans, but that they had insight into its true meaning (James 1:5). Calvin is probably wrong that they were kept from study of the religious superstitions and magic which characterized the Chaldeans.⁸¹ In order to be fully competent to meet the issues of their future life, they would need a thorough understanding of the religious practices of their day. Here the grace of God operated, however, in giving them understanding so they could distinguish between the true and the false. They not only had knowledge but discernment.

The expression "in all learning and wisdom" has reference to literature and the wisdom to understand it. As Keil puts it, Daniel "needed to be deeply versed in the Chaldean wisdom, as formerly Moses was in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts vii. 22), so as to be able to put to shame the wisdom of this world by the hidden wisdom of God."⁸²

Although all four youths shared in an intelligent understanding of the literature of the Chaldeans and were able to separate wisely the true from the false, only Daniel had understanding "in all visions and dreams." This was not a foolish boast but an actual fact necessary to understand Daniel's role as a prophet in the chapters which followed. In this, Daniel differed from his companions as a true prophet. His ability to discern and interpret visions and dreams primarily had in view the interpretation of the dreams and visions of others. However, this did not include the ability to know Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2, which Daniel received only after earnest prayer; and it did not necessarily as yet give Daniel the capacity to have visions and dreams himself as he did in chapter 7 and following.

Daniel's capacity included distinguishing a true dream from one that had no revelatory meaning and also the power to interpret it correctly. God's hand was already on Daniel even as a young man much as it was on Samuel centuries before. Although critics like Montgomery and others deprecate the significance and the importance of the prophetic gift in Daniel on the assumption of a second century date for the book, it becomes quite clear as the book progresses that though Daniel differed somewhat from the major prophets, his contribution is just as important and in fact, more extensive than that of any other book of the Old Testament.⁸³ To no other was the broad expanse of both Gentile and Hebrew future history revealed in the same precision.

In verse 18 the conclusion of their period of preparation is marked by a personal interview before Nebuchadnezzar, and they were brought into his presence by the prince of eunuchs himself. The expression at the end of the days means at the end of the three-year period. At this time, apparently all of the young men in training were tested by the king.

Under Nebuchadnezzar's searching questions, Daniel and his three companions, named with their Hebrew names, were found "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his

realm." By this is meant that they had high intelligence and keen discernment in the matters which they had studied. The statement that they were "ten times better," literally, "ten hands," at first glance sounds extravagant but signifies that they were outstandingly different. Even this praise, however, is mentioned in such a matter of fact way and so evidently due to the grace of God that Daniel is delivered from the charge of boasting. Their straightforward character and honesty, as well as the deep insight of these young men into the real meaning of their studies, must have stood in sharp contrast to the wise men of the king's court, who often were more sly and cunning than wise. Nebuchadnezzar, himself an extraordinarily intelligent man as manifested in his great exploits, was quick to respond to these bright young minds.

Chapter 1 concludes with the simple statement that Daniel continued unto the first year of king Cyrus. Critics have seized upon this as another inaccuracy because, according to Daniel 10:1, the revelation was given to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus. The large discussion that this has provoked is much ado about nothing. Obviously to Daniel, the important point was that his ministry spanned the entire Babylonian empire, and he was still alive when Cyrus came on the scene. The passage does not say nor necessarily imply that Daniel did not continue after the first year of Cyrus--which, as a matter of fact, he did.

The attempts to dislodge both verses 20 and 21 as illustrated in the comments of Charles, who wants to put them at the end of the second chapter, have been satisfactorily answered by Young.⁸⁴ Charles argues, "If the king had found the Jewish youths ten times wiser than all the sages of Babylon he would naturally have consulted them before the wise men of Babylon, and not have waited till, in ii.16, they volunteered their help."⁸⁵ This is, however, an arbitrary change in the text. If the events of chapter 2 follow chronologically at the end of chapter 1, they had demonstrated only proficiency in study, not ability to interpret dreams as in chapter 2. There is no indication in chapter 1 that they were immediately given the rank of chief wise men. Therefore, they were not called to interpret the dream of chapter 2. A similar situation is found in chapter 5, where Daniel, even with his record of interpreting dreams and visions, is not called in until others have failed. Critics are too eager to change the text of Scripture to suit their interpretations.

As is pointed out in the discussion of Daniel 2:1, it is entirely possible that the vision of Daniel 2 and the interpretation of the dream occurred during the third year of Daniel's training, before the formal presentation of the four youths to the king. This would take away all objections concerning the statement of Daniel 1:20, as it would make Daniel's graduation after the events of Daniel 2. That the book of Daniel is not written in strict chronological order is evident from the placing of chapters 5 and 6 before chapters 7 and 8, out of chronological order. In any case, there is no justification for arbitrary criticism of Daniel's record.

The narrative as it stands is beautifully complete--an eloquent testimony to the power and grace of God in a dark hour of Israel's history when the faithfulness of Daniel and his companions shines all the brighter because it is in a context of Israel's captivity and apostasy. In every age, God is looking for those whom He can use. Here were four young men whose testimony has been a source of strength to every saint in temptation. Certainly Daniel would not have been recognized as a prophet of God and the channel of divine revelation if he had not been a man of prayer and of uncompromising moral character, whom God could honor fittingly. Daniel and his companions represent the godly remnant of Israel which preserved the testimony of God even in dark hours of apostasy and divine judgment. The noble example of these young men will serve to encourage Israel in their great trials in the time of the end.

36 J. A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, pp. 113-16.

- 37 Carl Frederick Keil, Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel, p. 60.
- 38 Jack Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, p. 202.
- 39 Hayim Tadmor, "Chronicle of the Last Kings of Judah," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 15:227.
- 40 D. J. Wiseman, Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings, pp. 20-26.
- 41 H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Daniel, pp. 47-54.
- 42 Finegan, pp. 194-201.
- 43 Edwin R. Thiele, Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings, p. 166.
- 44 Leupold, pp. 54-55.
- 45 Keil, pp. 62-71.
- 46 Edward J. Young, The Prophecy of Daniel, p. 38.
- 47 Siegfried H Horn, Seventh Day Adventist Dictionary of the Bible, p. 83.
- 48 Young, p. 39.
- 49 Flavius Josephus, The Works of Flavius Josephus, p. 222.
- 50 Young, p. 39.
- 51 Montgomery, p. 119.
- 52 Robert H. Charles, The Book of Daniel, p. 7.
- 53 *In his discussion, Leupold observes correctly, "Critics should use uncertain terms with proper caution" (Leupold, p. 59).
- 54 A. L. Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," in Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, p. 308.
- 55 Montgomery, p. 127.
- 56 Leupold, p. 62. See Montgomery, pp. 127-28 for a complete discussion; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon to the Old Testament, p. 834.
- 57 Young, p. 42.
- 58 The privilege of sitting at the king's table is discussed by Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions, pp. 120-23.
- 59 Young p. 274.
- 60 Leupold, p. 64.
- 61 Keil, p. 79; Young, p. 43.

62 Keil, p. 79.

63 Cf. Young, p. 43.

64 Ibid.

65 Cf. Leupold, p. 65.

66 Ibid.; cf. Montgomery, p. 128.

67 Montgomery, pp. 128-29; Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 567; Horn, p. 724.

68 Young, p. 43.

69 Keil, pp. 79-80.

70 Cf. Tudith 12:1-4; Book of Jubilees 22:16; and the interesting account in Josephus, Life 3 (14), where we hear of certain Jewish priests in Rome who avoided defilement with Gentile food by living solely on figs and nuts (cf. Montgomery, p. 130).

71 Keil, p. 80.

72 Young, p. 45.

73 *Leupold credits Kliefoth as expressing this concept (Leupold, p. 66).

74 Ibid.

75 Montgomery, p. 131.

76 Cf. Leupold, p. 70; Keil, p. 81.

77 Young, pp. 45-46.

78 Montgomery, p. 131.

79 Young, p. 46; cf. Montgomery, p. 132.

80 John Calvin, Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel, 1:105.

81 Calvin, 1:112.

82 Keil, p. 83.

83 Montgomery states, "Dan.'s specialty in visions and dreams does not belong to the highest category of revelation, that of prophecy; the Prophets had long since passed away, 1 Mac. 4:46, and the highest business of the Jewish sage was the interpretation of their oracles" (Montgomery, p. 132). Montgomery rejects, of course, a sixth century B.C. date for Daniel, well before the last of the prophets. For refutation, see Young, pp. 49-50.

84 Young, pp. 52-53.

85 Charles, p. 12.

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