

Daniel – Introduction

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Introduction:

The Book of Daniel is considered by many to be the largest of the Minor Prophets. Others have said Daniel is the smallest of the Major Prophets. No matter how you look at it, it is a book of two basic themes. (1) The character of the man Daniel and his companions. (2) The prophecies that God gave Daniel concerning things to come. Daniel is one of the spiritual giants in the Bible and a wonderful example for Christians to this day. The prophecies in Daniel touch on not only the Old Testament history of Israel, but right into the future. The prophecy in Daniel forms a frame work for most Bible eschatology (the study of last things).

Daniel was a part of the original Jewish exiles sent to Babylon about 605 B.C. by the victorious Babylonian armies. It was the practice of the Babylonians to try and incorporate the bright young minds of their captive territories into their own nation. Daniel and other young men from Judah had been transported to Babylon. Daniel spent the rest of his life there. He wrote over a span of more than 70 years from Babylon. The book begins in Jerusalem about 605 B.C. and ends in Babylon a little more than 70 years later. During this time, Babylon was the super power in the world, both militarily and culturally. God used Babylon to chasten his people for their backslidden and rebellious hearts.

Daniel Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Overview:

Daniel 1 : 1 - *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jeru- salem, and besieged it.*

- The third year of Jehoiakim is about 606 B.C.
- As detailed in II Chronicles 36:5-8, Babylon under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar came and attacked Israel.
- That siege/attack lasted about a year.

Daniel 1 : 2 - *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 fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar was God chastening Judah for their sin.
- Accordingly, the Babylonians raided/plundered the Temple at Jerusalem
- They didn't destroy the temple on this trip but they stole good from it.
- They took part of the vessels of worship (**gold**) back to Babylon.
- There they were placed in the temple of Bel, the god of Babylon.
- The name *Shinar* literally refers to the '**land of two rivers.**'

- The land of Chaldea, which was the heart of Babylon, literally was situated between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Daniel 1 : 3 - *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.*

- After overtaking Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar also directed the chief of his eunuchs, a man by the name of Ashpenaz, to bring back to Babylon young men of royal or noble descent.
- Because Ashpenaz was a eunuch (castrated man) and placed over the young nobles of Judah, it has been debated as to whether those taken under his authority were likewise made eunuch.
- Either way from all appearances, Daniel never married.

Daniel 1 : 4 - *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.*

- The Babylonians had a policy of removing to Chaldea the best and brightest of the young nobles of conquered lands.
- In so doing, they trained them in the ways and values of Babylon and they helped pacify rebellion against their rule.
- As Moses was trained in the learning of the Egyptians, so Daniel was trained in that of the Chaldeans.
- The Chaldeans sought for adolescents who were of perfect form physically and were bright mentally.
- They hoped to build upon the educational foundation already instilled in these young men.
- The word translated as **learning** (*cephher*) literally means 'books.'
- Daniel and his associates were to learn not only the language of the Babylonians (Aramaic), but also the history and philosophy of Babylon.

Daniel 1 : 5 - *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.*

- Upon arriving in Babylon, the king ordered that Daniel and associates be given a daily allotment of the same meat and wine which he drank.
- This was to continue for the space of three years.
- The Babylonians thought that by eating the king's diet, these young men would be further improved both physically and mentally.
- The word translated as **meat** (*pathbag*) refers to delicacies of meat.
- From the context to follow, these clearly involved meats which observant Jews considered unclean, including various cuts of pork, bacon, and hams.
- The word translated **nourishing** (*gadal*) has the idea to 'make great or powerful.'
- The Babylonians thought they were giving Daniel and associates 'health' food to improve their physique and intellect.

Daniel 1 : 6 - *Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.*

- Each of the primary characters in the story at hand had names which referred to God.
- **Daniel** literally means ‘**God is my judge.**’
- **Hananiah** literally means ‘**God has favored or blessed.**’
- **Mishael** literally means ‘**who is what God is**’ or ‘**in the image of God.**’
- **Azariah** literally means ‘**Jehovah has helped**’ or ‘**Jehovah is my help.**’
- It is remarkable how ancient Hebrew names were not only Bible based, but actually all focused praise to God.
- Even in rebellious Judah of that day, some in the upper class named their children with praise to God.
- Obvious is the godly heritage of these four young men.
- As we will later see they lived up to their namesakes pretty well.

Daniel 1 : 7 - *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 Abednego.*

- The Babylonians took the Jewish names which all referred to God in some way and gave them pagan names referring to their pagan gods.
- To **Daniel** was given the name **Belteshazzar** which has the sense ‘**Bel’s treasurer,**’ or the ‘**keeper of his treasures**’.
- **Hananiah** became **Shadrach** which has the sense ‘**king’s messenger,**’ or ‘**the messenger the sun god.**’
- **Mishael** became **Meshach** which has the sense ‘**guest of Shach,**’ Shach being a Babylonian god.
- **Azariah** became **Abednego** which has the sense ‘**a servant of Nebo,**’ Nebo being another Babylonian god.
- What humiliation it must have been for these godly Jewish young men to have pagan names like these pinned on them.
- These pagan names probably helped them in their resolve to remain faithful to God.

Daniel 1 : 8 - *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.*

- It is remarkable how that Daniel and his companions had such spiritual character.
- Remember, they were just teenagers, far from home, far from any direct Jewish religious influence.
- They in all likelihood knew that they would never again see their home land.
- Where did they get such character and conviction?
- Most likely from the training they had received from their parents.
- They obviously had been well grounded in the Law of Moses.
- It reflects upon the consistency and character of their homes prior to their exile.
- The word translated as **purposed** (*suum*) also has the sense to ‘**determine.**’
- Daniel was determined to not defile himself.

- Though his daily rations from the king undoubtedly contained meats from unclean animals such as pork, ham, or bacon (not to mention the alcoholic beverages accompanying them), Daniel was determined not to be defiled.
- He purposed in his heart to be obedient to the Word of God as it pertained to him as an observant Jew.
- Daniel had a remarkable determination to do what was right and keep pure.
- And as we shall see, God richly rewarded and blessed for his obedience.
- Having refused the unclean foods set before him, notice how Daniel reacted.
- Daniel was not in any way disrespectful to the governmental authority over him.
- He did not demand his rights or threaten.
- Daniel had respect for the authority over him, even though he did not agree with it.
- He was respectful and requested that he not be made to eat the unclean meat..
- Later in the book, Daniel is described as having an excellent spirit. (Daniel 5:12 and 6:3.)
- That excellent spirit was already apparent in young Daniel.

Daniel 1 : 9 - *Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.*

- Notice how God providentially protected Daniel by causing him to be highly regarded by the prince of the eunuchs.
- This was, in part, because of Daniel's respect, but also more importantly, because God had arranged it that way.
- You can never go wrong doing what is right.
- One more time, You can never go wrong doing what is right.

Daniel 1: 10 - *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.*

- Ashpenaz, the prince of the eunuchs, was under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar.
- He was simply following orders.
- Now he was faced with a respectful and honest refusal of a royal order by Daniel.
- The head eunuch feared for his own fate.
- Ashpenaz believed that by eating the king's delicacies and alcoholic beverages that Daniel and friends would grow stronger and healthier.
- And as so often the case, the people of the world believe the lie of the devil.
- By declining to eat the king's food and drink, Ashpenaz feared they young men he was responsible for would get visibly diminished, noticeable even in their faces, when they stood before the king three years later.
- So basically he feared for his own life or head.

Daniel 1 : 11 - *Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.*

- Ashpenaz had placed an intermediate supervisor over Daniel and friends named Melzar.
- After hearing the complaint of Ashpenaz as noted above, Daniel offered a counterproposal to Melzar.

Daniel 1 : 12 - *Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.*

- Daniel and his companions took a large step of faith.
- Rather than eat the Babylonian foods which were not lawful for a Jew to eat, they requested *pulse*.
- *Pulse* simply means vegetables.
- So their deal was that they offered to eat only a vegetarian diet and water for ten days.
- By doing this they effectively put God to the test.
- They trusted God to honor them and bless them for doing what was right.
- And God did exactly that.
- They, by faith, believed that by eating a vegetarian diet rather than the king's meats (which were ceremonially unclean – Leviticus Chapter 11) and his alcoholic beverages that God would honor them
- The thought is not necessarily that eating a vegetarian diet is the way to better way to health (although it might be).
- The greater truth is doing right by faith and trusting God to bless.
- Daniel challenged Melzar to allow this alternative eating arrangement for ten days and then test them—“*prove thy servants.*”

Daniel 1 : 13 - *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.*

- The test Daniel proposed was simple.
- Allow him and his three associates to eat only a vegetarian diet for ten days.
- Then, compare these four with the others who did eat of the king's meat.
- The other Jewish young men present must not have had the character and conviction to say no to the Babylonian diet.
- They were willing to compromise convictions to get along.
- Daniel proposed a simple test, check out the complexion of the faces of the four who ate only a vegetarian diet versus those who ate the king's fare.
- After ten days, make a decision based upon what you can actually see.
- Again, the lesson is not vegetarianism versus eating meat.
- Rather, the moral of the story is of four young men who were willing to take a stand by faith, be obedient to God's Word, and do right before God.
- God will always honor such a conviction.
- Remember God blesses obedience

Daniel 1 : 14 - *So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.*

- Melzar consented to Daniel's proposal.
- He allowed Daniel and his three friends to proceed with their test for ten days.

Daniel 1 : 15 - *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.*

- At the end of the ten days, the complexions of Daniel and friends were clearer and their bodies appeared more solid and firm.

- The other Jewish captives who went along with the world's program and compromised their convictions were less by comparison.
- Once again, God honors those who by faith obey His Word and do that which is right.
- God had honored Daniel and friends obedience.

Daniel 1 : 16 - Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

- Melzar, the supervisor over Daniel and friends exempted them from the king's meats and alcohol and allowed them to only eat vegetables and water.
- That apparently continued throughout the three years while they were in preparation to stand before Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 1 : 17 - 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 and friends had put God to the test.
- They by faith had obeyed God's Word as it pertained to them.
- They by faith had done what was right.
- As a result God gave them (1) knowledge, (2) skill in all learning, (3) wisdom, and (4) to Daniel God gave understanding of dreams and visions.
- God blessed His obedient young servants with unusual mental I.Q. and intellect.
- He also gave them wisdom.
- Their diet coupled with their obedience to God resulted in sharpness of mind.
- In addition, God gave Daniel, the leader of this group, special understanding of visions and dreams.
- God was also providentially at work for He had a special ministry for Daniel ahead.

Daniel 1 : 18 - 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.

- When the three years were completed, Ashpenaz brought Daniel and his three associates before King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 1 : 19 - 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.

- The rest of the young Jewish captives were also brought before Nebuchadnezzar.
- However, there was no comparison between them and Daniel and friends
- As the king communed with them (i.e., talked to them, asked questions of them, and listened to them), he saw that they were brilliant beyond degree when compared to the others in captivity.
- God had also caused them to be visibly and physically better than their peers who partook of the Babylonian food/drink.
- They had honored God by avoiding the unclean foods and drink of the Babylonians.
- They by faith had obeyed the Word of God as it pertained to them.
- God in turn honored and blessed them.

Daniel 1 : 20 - *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.*

- Note that they were better in *all* matters of wisdom and understanding than their peers.
- In fact, Nebuchadnezzar found them ten times better than his own native-born, professional “*magicians and astrologers*” in his realm.
- Notice the pagan nature of Babylonian culture where the king had “*magicians and astrologers*” that he looked up to for advice.
- The word translated as **magicians** (*chartom*) literally refers to ‘*magicians, or astrologer.*’
- It also has the sense of ‘*of one possessed of occult knowledge.*’ (magic or supernatural knowledge)
- The word translated as **astrologers** (*ashshaph*) refers to ‘*astrologers, enchanters, or exorcists.*’
- This was the royal advisors to Nebuchadnezzar (great Godly crowd huh?)
- The world then and today is run by the devil.
- It was open and obvious then, and though it may be more discreet today it is still true.
- A clear moral of the story of Daniel chapter 1 is that God will specially bless those who by faith obey Him and do what is right. See Psalm 5:12
- Obedience leads to blessings (very common theme in the bible)

Daniel 1 : 21 - *And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.*

- Nebuchadnezzar besieged/attacked, took over Jerusalem in about 606 B.C.
- The initial captivity of Judah began the year later in 605 B.C.
- Cyrus ascended to his throne in 534 B.C. and Daniel lived at least that long.
- It was in the first year of Cyrus that the first decree allowing Ezra and others to return to rebuild the Temple was ordered. See Ezra 1:1
- Daniel, who was one of the first captives taken to Babylon, appears to have lived to see the end of the captivity.