

Daniel

Chapter 1

Daniel's Training in Babylon

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. ⁶ Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. ⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." ¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. ¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. ¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. ²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Luther says, "The first chapter brings us a fine example from Daniel's life. We see how holy, how God-fearing, and how possessed he was of a great and noble faith in God; and all this in the very midst of the wild and pagan life and the abominable offenses

which he had to listen to and look upon every day Babylon. In spite of it all, he remained firm and steadfast, and conquered all these temptations in his heart. For this reason there follows almost immediately (the account of) how God showed him great mercy, first highly honoring him in things of the spirit by granting him wisdom and understanding beyond that of other men, and then elevating him also in worldly affairs and doing and doing nothing but great and mighty deeds and miracles through him. God did this to show us all how much He loves and cherishes those who fear and trust in Him; with such an impressive example He prods us in a kindly way to faith and fear of God. (TLSB)

1:1 *third year.* According to the Babylonian system of computing the years of a king's reign, the third year of Jehoiakim would have been 605 B.C., since his first full year of kingship began on New Year's Day after his accession in 608. But according to the Judahite system, which counted the year of accession as the first year of reign, this was the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer 25:1; 46:2). (CSB)

third year ... of Jehoiakim. Ruled 609–598 BC. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco of Egypt at Carchemish (Jer 46:2) and took control of Judah. *Nebuchadnezzar.* Also spelled "Nebuchadrezzar." *besieged.* Cf 2Ki 24. Jer 27–28 also provides some context for the Babylonian attacks. (TLSB)

1:2 *Lord gave Jehoiakim ... into his hand.* Jehoiakim was subjected to Nebuchadnezzar as punishment for his sins (2Ki 23:35–24:1).(TLSB)

vessels of the house of God. Made by Solomon for temple worship (2Ch 4:19–22). (TLSB)

carried off. Judah was exiled to Babylonia because she disobeyed God's word regarding covenant-keeping, the Sabbath years and idolatry (see Lev 25:1–7; 26:27–35; 2Ch 36:14–21). The first deportation (605 B.C.) included Daniel, and the second (597) included Ezekiel. A third deportation took place in 586, when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. (CSB)

Shinar. Archaic name for land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. (TLSB)

his god. Chief Babylonian god, named Marduk or Bel (cf Jer 50:2. (TLSB)

treasury. Ancient temples often doubled as banks. See notes, 1Ch 18:11; 26:20–28. (TLSB)

1:3 *Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch.* Important Babylonian officials were often eunuchs. (TLSB)

royal family. Jehoiakim's family. *nobility.* Judean government officials. (TLSB)

That only the king himself and the nobility are mentioned as captives in Daniel 1:2-3 points to God's longsuffering and mercy toward Judah. The deportation in 605 BC was

only the first of three deportations to Babylon (see 2 Ki 24:15-16; 25:11; 2 Chr 36:20). The remaining people of Judah were given another chance to repent and turn to God. Unfortunately, the people of Judah did not repent and avail themselves of the mercy of God, leading to the catastrophe and third deportation in 587 BC. Likewise, the obduracy and rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish people as a whole would lead to the final destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Nevertheless, just as God's grace remained active among Daniel and the exiles and was ever offered to their Babylonian captors, so also the remnant of Israel that believed in the Christ was scattered in order to bring the saving Gospel also to Gentiles, that it might spread throughout the world, as indeed it has been to this day. (CC)

The exile of the royal family was likely the result of Nebuchadnezzar's attempt to rid the land of Judah of its next generation of leaders, thereby hindering the remaining Judeans from rebelling against Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also had the opportunity to train these exiles in Babylonian customs, promote them, and make them more loyal to him than to the nation of Judah or to Israel's God. (CC)

1:4 *youths without blemish.* Nebuchadnezzar sought first-rate Israelites to educate for three years (v 5). (TLSB)

stand in the king's palace. Once assimilated, well-trained servants could advise the king (vv 5, 19) regarding the governance of their home territory and their conquered countrymen. (TLSB)

language and literature of the Babylonians. Including the classical literature in Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform, a complicated syllabic writing system. But the language of normal communication in multiracial Babylon was Aramaic, written in an easily learned alphabetic script (see 2:4). (CSB)

Chaldeans. Ancient name for Babylonians (Gn 11:28); their language was Akkadian, written with cuneiform script. Intellectually elite culture in the Babylonian Empire. (TLSB)

The young men chosen for this inculcation into the Babylonian culture and hierarchy were not just any of the next generation of those who would have been Judah's leadership, but the best, both physically and intellectually. The threefold description of their intellectual abilities most probably emphasizes their fitness to be trained for service in the royal court. That training involved "the literature and language of the Chaldean." This required them to learn Akkadian and its cuneiform writing system. Unlike their native Hebrew or the more cosmopolitan Aramaic, which were written with alphabetic symbols, the cuneiform signs were syllabic. This complicated system that uses hundreds of signs would have taken some time to learn to read with proficiency, which accounts for the three years of training that they were to receive before they could enter into full-time service in the Babylonian court. (CC)

1:6 *Daniel.* Means "God is (my) Judge." (CSB)

Hananiah. Means “The LORD shows grace.” (CSB)

Mishael. Means “Who is what God is?” (CSB)

Azariah. Means “The LORD helps.” (CSB)

Names of these youths all end with “el” (Hbr *'elohim*, “God”) or “iah” (Hbr *yahweh*, “LORD”) and so proclaim the God of Israel. (TLSB)

tribe of Judah. From which Jesus would come (Mt 1:2, 16). (TLSB)

The new names they were assigned are probably all corrupted forms of Babylonian theophoric names honoring gods of the Babylonian pantheon. It appears as if these names in this verse are purposely bowdlerized by Daniel. First of all, the theophoric element in each name contains a corruption involving an addition, deletion, or change of one or more consonants. Thus “Belt-“ instead of “Bel-“ in “Beltshazzar,” “-k” instead of “marduk” in “Shadrach,” “-nego” instead of “-nabu” “Abednego.” This consistent pattern points to deliberate alteration of the names. (CC)

Second, this may have been a covert and subversive way of protesting the attempted detachment of these young men from Israel’s God. They had no choice in the matter, but Daniel may have been indicating that while they could not do anything about what the Babylonians were intent on calling them, they did not personally approve of having names associated with pagan gods instead of their God. (CC)

Beltshazzar. Probably means, in Babylonian, “Bel (i.e., Marduk), protect his life!” (CSB)

Daniel’s new name referred to the god Bel (akin to Hbr *ba‘al*; probably here Babylonian Marduk). All the new names likely referred to Babylonian gods. (TLSB)

Shadrach. Probably means “command of Aku (Sumerian moon-god).” (CSB)

Meshach. Probably means “Who is what Aku is?” (CSB)

Abednego. Means “servant of Nego/Nebo (i.e., Nabu).” (CSB)

1:1–7 God punishes unrepentant Jehoiakim and allows many Judeans to become exiles in Babylon. Yet Daniel and his friends will learn that the Lord is still in control, even though they are in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar (chs 2–6). God will protect the young men and use them to glorify His name. He likewise uses the testimony of Christians today to proclaim His saving name and work, even in the most challenging circumstances. • Jesus, may we never be ashamed of confessing You as our Lord and Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

1:8 God's Law prohibited His OT people from eating certain foods (Lv 11; Dt 14:3–21). In moderate amounts, wine is healthful and was not forbidden by OT Law (cf Ps 104:15). However, too much wine disrupts sleep and often causes headaches and lethargy (cf Pr 23:29–35). (TLSB)

royal food and wine. Israelites considered food from Nebuchadnezzar's table to be contaminated because the first portion of it was offered to idols. Likewise a portion of the wine was poured out on a pagan altar. Ceremonially unclean animals were used and were neither slaughtered nor prepared according to the regulations of the law. (CSB)

he asked ... not to defile himself. He demonstrated the courage of his convictions. (CSB)

1:9 *God had caused the official to show favor ... to Daniel.* The careers of Joseph and Daniel were similar in many respects (see Ge 39–41). (CSB)

Daniel had an unseen, powerful protector. (TLSB)

1:10 The chief eunuch knew Nebuchadnezzar's capacity for violence. Should Daniel's physical appearance worsen, the king might punish his official with beheading. (TLSB)

1:11 *steward.* Or, "superintendent." Guardian assistant to the chief eunuch. (TLSB)

Daniel approaches a lesser official with a new plan. (CC)

1:12 *test your servants.* Daniel used good judgment by offering an alternative instead of rebelling. (CSB)

That Daniel would ask for such a short test period demonstrates his confidence that God would reward his faithfulness. (CC)

ten. Often had the symbolic significance of completeness. (CSB)

Test ... for ten days. Short period in which to observe change. Hipp: "They teach that it is not earthly meats that give to men their beauty and strength, but the grace of God bestowed by the Word" (ANF 5:186).

vegetables. No vegetables were forbidden in OT food laws. On the Israelite diet. (TLSB)

Before sin entered, Adam and Eve were vegetarians as were the animals.

1:13 COMPARE OUR APPEARANCE – That Daniel would ask for such a short test period demonstrates his confidence that God would reward his faithfulness. At the same time, he makes clear that he is not defying the superintendent's authority or the king's order, since he suggests that the superintendent alone could be the final judge of the experiment with a vegetarian diet. (CC)

Daniel is also wise enough to recognize that authority is often divided among several individuals. Instead of defying authority, he seeks out a different official who has more limited power, and to him Daniel offers a more limited request. In this way, Daniel avoids breaking the Fourth Commandment and is able to take a step toward his goal of not having to break the First Commandment or the dietary laws. (CC)

1:15-16 Although God is not mentioned as the cause for the better health of the young Judeans, it is clear that Daniel is implying that God has rewarded the faithfulness of these four men. The diet now becomes the prescription for all of the young men in training in Nebuchadnezzar's academy—not just the four, but all the Judeans and all the others as well. (CC)

This first testing of Daniel and his friends demonstrates their ability to withstand the pressure of a foreign culture to compromise their faith. It is likely that these young men in training (1:4–5) were only young adolescents at this time, perhaps around fourteen years of age. Yet they show remarkable maturity in faith, and Daniel in particular demonstrates wisdom and tact that is not normally possessed by one so young. All of these qualities are implied to be gifts from God, not simply human characteristics produced by these young men. (CC)

1:15 Compared to the youths who ate the king's diet, the Judeans appeared healthier. A sound diet maintains the body's hydration and muscle tone. However, the noticeable difference between the Judeans and the other youths in such a short amount of time should be attributed to God's intervention. (TLSB)

1:17 *God gave them learning and skill.* This blessing was in addition to their natural abilities (v 4). (TLSB)

understanding in all visions and dreams. Like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel would use this special gift (chs 2; 4; 5). (TLSB)

With God's help, Daniel and his friends mastered the Babylonian literature on astrology and divination by dreams. But in the crucial tests of interpretation and prediction (see 2:3–11; 4:7), all the pagan literature proved worthless. Only by God's special revelation (2:17–28) was Daniel able to interpret correctly. (CSB)

Dan 1:17 specifically mentions further gifts from God to these young men that went beyond those gifts needed to request and succeed in the dietary experiment. They are given "knowledge" (מָרָע) and "insight" (הַשְׂכִּיל) into their studies. These and cognate words occur frequently in OT Wisdom literature, and in the NT, their Greek equivalents refer to God's gifts for a wise and discerning life of faith in Christ. (CC)

1:18 *end of the time.* Three years. (TLSB)

1:19 THE KING TALKED WITH THEM – Apparently Nebuchadnezzar reserved for himself the final examination of these young men at the end of their prescribed training period. The results of God’s gift to them of knowledge and insight were obvious even to Nebuchadnezzar, though he probably did not attribute their ability to Israel’s God. Dan 1:20 is probably to be understood as a general statement about their service throughout the time they were in Nebuchadnezzar’s employ, rather than implying that in one interview he found them superior to all of his wise men. Instead, this statement is prospective and primes the reader to expect in later chapters further accounts of how Nebuchadnezzar learned of the Judeans’ superiority. (CC)

1:20 *ten*. See **note** on v. 12. (CSB)

Their superior wisdom and understanding was the result of God’s grace (v 17). (TLSB)

“Ten times [better]” (1:20) is the first time in Daniel that we find the use of a number in a symbolic or metaphorical way. Such uses of numbers will become more prominent in the visions later in the book. This is one example that refutes the dispensational rule that all numbers in prophecy must be taken literally. Certainly, “ten times” does not represent a quantifiable measure of the Judeans’ abilities relative to the other trainees. Instead, it signifies the surpassing nature of their skill and points the reader once again to God’s control over the events even in Nebuchadnezzar’s government. As later chapters will affirm, all the kingdoms of this world are subservient to God’s kingdom. (CC)

The surpassing knowledge of the young Daniel and his friends before the Babylonian court was a foretaste of Jesus Christ’s surpassing knowledge, which he would demonstrate at the young age of twelve:

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. (Lk 2:46–47) (CC)

magicians. See **note** on Ge 41:8. (CSB)

Consulted for advice and guidance. God will show His superiority over these false prophets. (TLSB)

1:21 C 66 years after his exile began (see note, v 1), Daniel survived the transition of the kingdom from the Babylonians to the Persians. Chs 1–5; 7–8 relate to the Babylonian period; chs 6; 9–12 relate to the Persian period. (TLSB)

first year of King Cyrus. Over Babylon (539 B.C.). Daniel was still living in the year 537 (10:1), so he saw the exiles return to Judah from Babylonian captivity. (CSB)

The final notice in this chapter tells us that Daniel served Chaldean kings in the royal court for a long time, until the first year that Cyrus, king of Persia, officially became king over Babylon, spring 538–spring 537 BC, after having conquered it in 539. If we assume that Daniel was about fourteen years of age when taken into captivity in 605 BC, he would have been about eighty-one or eighty-two years old when he finally retired from royal service. He lived until at least the beginning of Cyrus' third year (10:1, 4), spring 536, when he would have been about eighty-three years old. (CC)

Moreover, this notice tells us that Daniel did not write this chapter (in its present form) until after his service had ended. Thus the book of Daniel is an early Persian period composition, as indicated at both its beginning (1:21) and near its end (10:1). This explains the Persian loanwords that appear in the book. Many of these may have already crept into the Aramaic or Hebrew used by the exiles before the fall of Babylon, but many of them may have been quickly adopted by necessity into the Aramaic used by courtiers such as Daniel because of Cyrus' accession to the throne of Babylon. (CC)

1:8–21 Daniel and his friends determine not to violate God's laws, even though they live in a heathen environment God, the source of all wisdom, blesses and preserves them in faithfulness. When you are tempted by worldly pressures to sin against the Lord, call to mind the example of these God-fearing youths. Your Lord, the Savior, is with you even now, and He will not forsake you. • Heavenly King, strengthen my resolve to follow Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)