

Daniel's Faithfulness



Daniel 1

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Having finished the book of Revelation, it is highly appropriate that we look at the book of Daniel next. Both books address the return of the Messiah and they complement each other. Of course, the book of Daniel covers much more than just the return of the Messiah; it addresses a broader period of time from when Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. We generally refer to time of the Babylonian captivity to the return of the Messiah to establish His Millennial Kingdom as the *"Times of the Gentiles"* because gentile nations will oppress Israel starting with Babylon and extending through even today.

I have to tell you that Daniel is my favorite of the Old Testament prophets because it was the prophecies in this book that God used to help me see the need for Christ in my life. Daniel's prophetic descriptions of nations to come that would rule over Jerusalem are so accurate that some scoffers have insisted it had to have been written long after the time of Daniel. But Jesus referred to the book of Daniel as having been written by the prophet Daniel in His Olivet Discourse.

It was those accurate descriptions and the prophecies of conditions before the Messiah returns that convinced me the Bible really had to be from God because only God can declare *the end from the beginning* as Isaiah 46 proclaims.

The book of Daniel makes it clear that even though Judah was exiled from the land of Israel, God was still working in their midst. And even though Daniel and at least three of his countrymen were being indoctrinated into the ways of the Babylonians, they remained faithful to God and He blessed them as a result.

Some Jewish Rabbis may not respect Daniel as a prophet of the highest esteem because He ended up living as a prince, not having the difficulties in life as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or some of the other prophets.

Also, Daniel wrote his book in a heathen country where he had his visions, and not in the land of Israel.

However, the writings of Daniel are important because he speaks plainly of both the time of the Messiah's first advent and His return. Alright, with that introduction, let's look at the first chapter which gives us some insight into Daniel's character; in particular, his faithfulness to God...

Daniel 1:1-2 – *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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.*

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, referred to here as *the land of Shinar*, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple during *the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah* in 586 BC. The Babylonians carried off articles of the temple along with many Jews into captivity. This invasion of Judah by Babylon was actually the third and final time they had come. They had also come into Judah 11 years before that and the first time was 8 years before that in 605 BC; and that first invasion was when Daniel and his 3 countrymen were taken.

God raised up Babylon to conquer Judah as a consequence for their unfaithfulness to Him per His warning in Deuteronomy 29:25-28. The timeframe for their captivity in Babylon was to be 70 years as foretold by the prophet in Jeremiah 25:11. This period of time was determined by God because Judah had neglected observing the sabbaths for the land as He made clear in 2 Chronicles 36:21. The Lord is longsuffering because it had been 490 years that Judah had not observed the sabbaths for the land. 490 divide by 7 is 70 years.

Observing the land sabbaths were part of the Law given to Moses, specifically Leviticus 25:2-4. Obeying the Law was important for Israel who had been set apart as God's representatives to mankind on earth. Keeping the Law demonstrated faithfulness to God.

But contrary to the claims of the legalistic Pharisees, the Israelites could not earn salvation by being obedient to the Law. If a person was honest with themselves, it wasn't possible to perfectly keep the Law. So, all the Law really did was drive the Old Testament saints back to God for His mercy.

- They were saved the same way we are saved today... by grace, the unmerited favor of God, through faith in His provision for eternal life.
Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

God's faithful in Old Testament times knew they couldn't perfectly keep the Law but they demonstrated their faith by doing the best they could and trusted in God's grace. They knew His provision would have something to do with the promised Messiah but didn't know what.

- We have the advantage today of knowing the details of the provision God made for our salvation... Jesus dyed on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin.

Judah's unfaithfulness to God went beyond their neglect of the land sabbaths, they had also embraced the idolatry of the nations around them which is what caused God to raise up the Babylonians to chasten Judah.

- Idolatry is compromising with the world in worshiping what is created instead of the Creator.
- Idolatry is like adultery... unfaithfulness to Whom faithfulness is due.

v3-5 – Chaldean Indoctrination of the Jews

³ Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴ young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵ And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

King Nebuchadnezzar not only destroyed Jerusalem but took the shining lights of Judah's future, the best and brightest of their children. Daniel was probably even in the royal line of David. These young Israelites were chosen to be trained along-side King Nebuchadnezzar's own descendants. The training they received was essentially indoctrination into the ways of the Babylonians which were also called the Chaldeans. This brain washing was intended to wipe out the culture of the Jews.

Ashpenaz was Nebuchadnezzar's "master of the eunuchs" (v3) ...so this means Daniel and his countrymen were probably made eunuchs themselves as prophesied...

2 Kings 20:16-18 – *Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁷ 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the Lord. ¹⁸ 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"*

The king of Babylon employed eunuchs in his service so that they could focus on serving him rather than be distracted by women. (And we all know women can be quite a distraction.) The Babylonians of course also used eunuchs to be in charge of royal harems.

Daniel and his countrymen were chosen to partake of royal Babylonian instruction due to several reasons:

- King Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the Hebrews were intelligent, ingenious, inspired and thus had great potential in supporting his kingdom.
- The young men were to be of noble or royal extraction... handsome with no physical abnormalities, well informed, quick to understand, and with an aptitude for learning (v4)
- As the Temple vessels which the Babylonians took, these young boys were also considered as “trophies” to show off Nebuchadnezzar’s military and government success.
- These children were also hostages that insured the fidelity, loyalty, and control of their parents left behind in the land of the Hebrews.
- He was also training up a succession of people who would be fit for public service and have the ability to conduct the king’s business.

The training Daniel and his countrymen would have received included...

- being taught the language and literature of the Babylonians (aka Chaldeans)
- They were to be trained in the laws of the country, their history, philosophy, mathematics, and even the art of war and navigation
- They were given three years to finish their education and then be judged by the king himself for their competence and skills (v5)

In addition to the training, the students were to partake of the king’s own delicacies. This too was part of their indoctrination... King Nebuchadnezzar wanted these young men to experience his generosity and know that they could look to him for everything they needed. As we’ll see, they instead looked to God!

v6-7 – Jews Names Changed

⁶Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

The “*prince of the eunuchs*” changed the names of the Israelite boys to demonstrate his authority over them. And this too was part of their indoctrination... if they are going to be Chaldeans, they needed Chaldean names!

- Daniel: “*God is my Judge*” – Belteshazzar: signifies “*the keeper of the hidden treasures of “Bel”* (moon god)
- Hananiah: “*The grace of the Lord*” – Shadrach: means “*the inspiration of the sun*” (Sun god Re)
- Mishael: “*He that is the strong God*” – Meshach: means “*the goddess Shach*”, the name in which Venus was worshiped
- Azariah: “*The Lord is my help*” – Abednego: means “*the servant of the shining fire*” (they also worshiped the god of fire)

v8 – Daniel’s Dilemma – ⁸But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel and his companions would not accept the choicest food and wine provided because they knew it had been “sacrificed” to the Chaldean idols and thus they would have been *made unclean* by eating it.

- It was the Babylonian mode of worship to sacrifice animals to their gods.
- While it was also the Hebrews mode of worship to sacrifice animals to God, it was only the Jewish priests who ate the food that had been sacrificed to God.

The practice of sacrificing animals actually originated from God Himself...

Genesis 3:21 – *for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them*

To make clothes from animal skins, the animals had to be killed. This shedding of blood symbolized the covering of sin that would be achieved by blood sacrifice. This practice was also demonstrated in the first sons of Adam & Eve...

Genesis 4:3-5 – *Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.*

The principle behind the practice of blood sacrifice is explained...

Hebrews 9:22 – *without shedding of blood there is no remission [of sin]*

So, blood sacrifice pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that would be made when Jesus died on the cross to pay our sin penalty.

The reason idol worshipers also sacrificed animals was to copy the Creator-God. These practices were embraced by human religions that were inspired by demons masquerading as God to distort the principles God revealed to us.

2 Corinthians 11:14 – *And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*

v9 – How God Blessed Daniel

⁹ *Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.*

God enabled Daniel to escape the temptation to be defiled by the king's food in giving him "favor and good will" with the authorities. Certainly, Daniel's wise actions contributed to his good will but even that was God working through Daniel.

v10-13 – Daniel's Solution to the Dilemma

¹⁰ *And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."*

¹¹ *So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants."*

Daniel shrewdly handled the situation by proposing a test... for him and his countrymen to drink only water and eat only vegetables (which would not have been sacrificed to idols) for 10 days to see how they fared in comparison to the others.

Daniel made a big deal of not eating the King's food because he was being faithful in the little things... His relationship with God touched every area of his life, even what he ate and drank.

v14-16 – The 10-Day Test

¹⁴ *So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. ¹⁵ And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. ¹⁶ Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.*

Daniel and his friends passed the test. They were healthier than the others who ate the king's food.

How was this possible? God was with them and blessed their effort to honor Him.

- They had been taken away from their families, their home, lost their manhood, had their names changed, and told what to eat – yet they were still faithful to God!
- In the long term, Daniel and his companions would be blessed even more by being promoted because of their faithfulness to God.

v17-20 – The Jews Graduate from their Training

¹⁷ *As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.*

¹⁸ *Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.*

¹⁹ *Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. ²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.*

Among the blessings of God, Daniel and his friends excelled in their training. Their special intellectual ability was not due to their diet, but to the special intervention of the Lord.

- These young men from Jerusalem were immersed in the study of Babylonian culture, literature and religion; yet they remained faithful to God.
- The groundwork of the prophets and other faithful Israelites that had gone before them had not been in vain; they were in the world, but not part of it!

At the end of their training, the king found the Hebrews to be ten times better than all the *magicians and astrologers* in the whole kingdom of Babylon. These *magicians and astrologers* were the learned men the king used to advise him.

- The intellectual acumen of the loyal dedicated young Hebrew men was God's gift to them

The fact that the king personally interviewed the trainees emphasized the importance of the training. The direct questioning by King Nebuchadnezzar also speaks highly of his own intelligence and desire to take advantage of the most gifted individuals in his service.

v21 – ²¹ *Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.*

We will see later that Daniel would be promoted to become the supervisor of the *magicians and astrologers* who advised the king. He would continue to hold various ranking roles in the kingdom which would be the case even when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon.

The Persian king Cyrus is mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible. This pagan king is important because it was under his rule that Jews were first allowed to return to Israel after 70 years of captivity.

- In one of the most amazing prophecies of the Bible, the Lord revealed Cyrus's decree to free the Jews to Isaiah. 150 years before Cyrus lived, the prophet calls him by name and gives details of Cyrus' benevolence to the Jews (Isaiah 45:1, 4).

What observations have you made about God's special relationship with the nation of Israel in this introduction to the book of Daniel?

Some observations I have made are:

- The Jews were being punished for their unfaithfulness which "greatly" displeased God.
- God's chastening of the Jews was out of His love for them to save them from themselves
- King Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant for implementing His plan
- Despite Israel's chastening, there was a remnant, some Jews who still honored and pleased God

What application can be made to the here and now?

- We can be blessed even in the mist of dire circumstances when we remain faithful to God.
- Honor God even in the small things and He will bless us.