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Early Life of Daniel in Babylon

The first chapter of Daniel is a beautifully written, moving story of the early days of Daniel and his Jewish companions in Babylon. In condensed form, it records the historical setting for the entire book. Moreover, it sets the tone as essentially the history of Daniel—who may have been a member of Judah’s royal family (Dan. 1:3; cf. Isa. 39:6–7)—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 a governmental servant and a faithful historian of God’s dealings with him. Although shorter than prophetic books such as 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 by God. With the possible exceptions of Moses and Solomon, Daniel was the most learned man in the Old Testament and very thoroughly trained for his important role in history and literature.

THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH (1:1-2)

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. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

The book of Daniel is set in the Jewish *diaspora* (dispersion after exile) and “the times of the Gentiles.” The opening verses succinctly give the historical setting, including the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the first of three deportations. According to Daniel, the deportation of him and his companions occurred “in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah,” which was 605 B.C. Parallel accounts are found in 2 Kings 24:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:5–7. Daniel doesn’t record the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 B.C. From his perspective the time of Gentile domination began at this first deportation. These events 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 (Isa. 24:1–6) and had neglected the Sabbath day and the sabbatical 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.

The people of Israel had also given themselves to idolatry (1 Kings 11:5; 12:28; 16:31; 18:19; 2 Kings 21:3–5; 2 Chron. 28:2–3), and had been solemnly warned of God’s coming judgment in relation to this sin (Jer. 7:24–8:3; 44:20–23). But the people failed to heed God and repent, so they were carried off captive to Babylon, a center of idolatry and one of the most evil cities in the ancient world. It is significant that after the Babylonian captivity, idolatry such as that which caused the nation’s judgment and exile was never again 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: Israel was a “sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged” (Isa. 1:4). The capture of Jerusalem and the exile of these first captives were the beginning of the end for the holy city, which had been made magnificent by David and Solomon. When the Word of God is ignored and violated, divine judgment is inevitable. The spiritual lessons embodied in the cold fact of the captivity may well be pondered by the church today, which

too often has a form of godliness but without its power. Worldly saints do not capture the world but become instead the world's captives.

Daniel's dating of his exile as 605 B.C. has long been attacked as inaccurate by critics. They point 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). This supposed chronological error is used as the first in a series of alleged proofs that Daniel is a spurious book written by one unfamiliar with the events of the captivity. There are, however, several good explanations.

One explanation is that Daniel is using Babylonian reckoning (cf. the discussion in the introduction on Nabonidus and Belshazzar). 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. Finegan has demonstrated that the phrase "the first year of Nebuchadnezzar" in Jeremiah actually means "the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar"¹ in the Babylonian reckoning. Tadmor was among the first to support this solution, and the point may now be considered as well established.²

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, and date Jehoiakim's reign from his second year. By contrast, Jeremiah would use Israel's form of reckoning that 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.

A second, though less likely, interpretation is suggested by Leupold,³ who points to the reference in 2 Kings 24:1 where Jehoiakim is said to submit to Nebuchadnezzar for three years. This view is built on 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.⁴ There Nebuchadnezzar met Pharaoh Necho and destroyed the Egyptian army; this occurred "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (Jer. 46:2).

Leupold believes 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. To support this, Leupold says 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.

But Leupold's suggested solution to the apparent chronological discrepancy seems rather strained, especially since the first explanation reconciles the two dates in a way that acknowledges the unique dating systems being used at that time. Both Finegan⁵ and Thiele,⁶ who were recognized authorities on biblical chronology, believe the dates can be harmonized through a proper understanding of the specific dating systems being used by Daniel and Jeremiah. Thiele assumes Daniel employed a calendar in which the new year began in the fall in the month Tishri (September–October) while Jeremiah based his dates on a calendar in which the new year began in the spring in the month Nisan (March–April). According to the Babylonian Chronicle, "Nebuchadnezzar conquered all of Ha[ma]th,"⁷ 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.

The probability is that either Wiseman or Thiele is right, and that Daniel was carried away 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 king was his father, Nabopolassar, who died while Nebuchadnezzar was away in battle. Nebuchadnezzar heard of his father's death and hurried back to Babylon to be

crowned as king. Daniel, writing after the fact, used the title “king” in reference to Nebuchadnezzar in anticipation of his ascension to the throne. 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 records that Jehoiakim was subdued, and that Nebuchadnezzar brought “some of the vessels of the house of God . . . to 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 Zechariah prophesies evil will someday return (Zech. 5:11).

The expression “he brought” (v. 2) 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 taking captives is unnecessary in the light of the context of the following verses, where their deportation to Babylon is discussed in detail. There was no need to mention it twice.

Bringing the vessels to the house of Nebuchadnezzar’s god Marduk⁸ 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 Chron. 36:18), and they all appeared on the fateful night of Belshazzar’s feast in Daniel 5. This fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, spoken a century before, that the wealth of Jerusalem would be carried off to Babylon (Isa. 39:6).

JEWISH YOUTHS SELECTED FOR TRAINING (1:3–7)

1:3–7 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king

assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

THE NAMES OF DANIEL AND HIS THREE COMPANIONS			
Their original Hebrew names (1:6)		Their new Babylonian names (1:7)	
Daniel:	“God is my Judge”	Belteshazzar:	“Lady protect the king”
Hananiah:	“Yahweh is gracious”	Shadrach:	“I am very fearful (of God)”
Mishael:	“Who is what God is?”	Meshach:	“I am of little account”
Azariah:	“Yahweh has helped”	Abednego:	“Servant of (the god) Nebo”

* These translations are based on Edwin Yamauchi’s name identifications in “The Archaeological Background of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 545 (January–March 1980), 4.

In explanation of how he and his companions arrived in Babylon, Daniel records that the king commanded his servant Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites to Babylon for training to serve in the court. The name Ashpenaz, according to Horn, “appears in the Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur as ‘SPNZ, and is probably attested in the Cuneiform records as *Ashpazdnda*.”⁹ The significance of the name *Ashpenaz* has been much debated, but it seems best to agree with Young that “its etymology is uncertain.”¹⁰

It is probable that the term “eunuchs” refers 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.¹¹ Isaiah had predicted this years before (Isa. 39:7), and Young supports the broader meaning of *eunuch* by the Targum rendering of the Isaiah passage that uses the word *nobles* for *eunuchs*.¹² 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 [Josephus] hints: ‘he made some of them eunuchs.’”¹³ Charles writes in commenting on the description in Daniel 1:4, “without blemish”: “The perfection here asserted is physical, as in Lev. 21:17. Such perfection could not belong to eunuchs.”¹⁴ Ultimately the choice is left to the interpreter, although, as indicated above, many favor the thought of “court officer.”

Those selected for royal service are described as being from “the royal family” and “the nobility” of Israel. These young men came from the southern kingdom of Judah, not the northern kingdom of Israel, which had already been carried off into captivity. The reference to them being from Israel means that they were indeed Israelites—that is, descendants of Jacob.

The Hebrew for *nobility* is derived from a Persian word, *partemim*, which is cited as another proof for a late date of Daniel. However, given that Daniel served under the Persian government as a high official in the latter years of his life, there is nothing strange about an occasional Persian word. Moreover, it is not even clear that the word is strictly Persian, as its origin is uncertain.¹⁵

In selecting these youths for education in his court in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was accomplishing several objectives. Those carried away captive could well serve as hostages to help keep the royal family still in Judah in line. Their presence in the king’s court would also 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 the 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 “of good appearance.” They were to be superior intellectually, and their previous education as

children of the nobility certainly was a factor. Their capacity to have understanding in “learning” should not be taken in the modern sense, but rather as referring to their skill in all areas of learning of their day. So the total physical, personal, and intellectual capacities of Daniel and his companions, 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 literature and language 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 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 this learning was of no help to Daniel and his friends 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 daily provision of food and wine from the king’s table. Ancient literature contains many references to this practice. 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.¹⁶ Such food was “appointed,” or “assigned, in the sense of numerical distribution.”¹⁷

The expression “a daily portion” is literally “a portion of the day in its day.” The word for “food” (Heb. *pathbagh*), according to Leupold, “is a Persian loan word from the Sanscrit *pratibagha*.”¹⁸ Although it is debatable whether the word specifically means “delicacies,” as Young considers that it means “assignment,”¹⁹ the implication is certainly there that the royal food was lavish and properly called “rich food” (as in the RSV).²⁰

Nebuchadnezzar’s bountiful provision was intended to give Daniel and his companions ample food supplies for their three-year education. The

expression “to be educated for three years” refers to training that would be given a child. The goal was to bring them to intellectual maturity to “stand before the king,” equivalent to becoming his servants 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. No other names are given; the corrupting influences of Babylon were probably too much for the other captives, and they were useless in God’s hands.

The name “Daniel” is used of at least three other characters besides the prophet Daniel (1 Chron. 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 this identification 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 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, and someone who could hopefully use his influence to keep Nebuchadnezzar from destroying Jerusalem.²¹ The contention of critics that Ezekiel is referring to a mythological character mentioned in the Ras Shamra texts (dated 1500–1200 B.C.) is, as Young states, “extremely questionable.”²²

The change in the name of Daniel and his three companions focuses attention upon the meaning of both their Hebrew and Babylonian names (see accompanying chart). Significantly, their Hebrew names indicate their relationship to the God of Israel, and suggest 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 like Elijah’s seven thousand in Israel who did not bow the knee to Baal (cf. 1 Kings 19:18).

Part of the assimilation process was to give the young men Babylonian names to help in their cultural transformation, as was customary when an individual entered a new situation (cf. Gen. 17:5; 41:45; 2 Sam. 12:24–25;

2 Kings 23:34; 24:17; Esth. 2:7).²³ Renaming also shows that they were now under the authority of the Babylonians. Much like Adam giving names to the animals in Genesis 2, “Name-giving in the ancient Orient was primarily an exercise of sovereignty, of command.”²⁴ The goal of the program was to make these future leaders thoroughly Babylonian in their thoughts and actions.

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 pagan 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)

1:8–10 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king.”

Daniel and his companions were confronted with the problem of compromise in the matter of eating food provided by Nebuchadnezzar which, no doubt, indicated the king’s favor. Daniel, however, “resolved” or literally “laid upon his heart” not to defile himself (cf. Isa. 42:25; 47:7; 57:1, 11; Mal. 2:2).

There are several possible reasons for Daniel’s decision.²⁵ It’s possible 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. And while there was no complete prohibition against drinking wine in the law, here the problem was that the wine, as well as the

meat, had been dedicated to idols as was customary in Babylon. To eat and drink of this food 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."²⁶

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.

Daniel's approach also reflects his good judgment and common sense. Instead of inviting punishment by rebellion, he courteously requests of the chief prince of the eunuchs that he might be excused from eating food that would defile his conscience (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). He offered a creative compromise to achieve the goal of the king without violating his religious principles. Although critics attempt to equate this abstinence with fanaticism and thereby link it to the Maccabean period,²⁷ there is no excuse for such a charge since Daniel handles the situation with sagacity. Leupold points out that Daniel did not object to the Babylonian names given to them nor to their education that involved the learning of the Chaldeans, including their religious views.²⁸ These were not a direct conflict with the Jewish law. But here Daniel is exercising a proper conscience in matters that were of real importance.

When Daniel made his request to the chief of the eunuchs, God gave Daniel favor and compassion with this official. The word "favor" (Heb. *hesed*) means kindness or good will. "Compassion" translates a plural term intended

to denote deep sympathy. It is clear that God intervened on Daniel's behalf in preparing the way for his request.

Ashpenaz, however, was not speaking idly when he replied to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king," for if he did not fulfill his role well he well might lose his "head," an apt picture of the potential life-and-death consequences for disobeying the king. Ashpenaz did not want to be caught changing the king's orders for the captives' diets, knowing that if they showed any ill effects, he would be held responsible. The expression "worse condition" does not imply any dangerous illness, but only difference of appearance, such as paleness or perhaps excessive thinness.

DANIEL'S REQUEST FOR A TEN-DAY TEST (1:11-14)

1:11-14 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days.

Ashpenaz could have simply denied Daniel's request without discussion. But his attempt to explain the problem opened the door for Daniel's counterproposal (vv. 12–13), a ten-day test period. 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."²⁹

The King James Version indicates this request is made to Melzar, but the probability is that this is not a proper name and simply means "the steward" or the chief attendant.³⁰ The Septuagint changes the text here to indicate that Daniel had actually spoken to "Abiezdrí who had been appointed chief eunuch over Daniel." Critics 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 chief of eunuchs. Young, after Calvin, refutes this idea, however, and believes that Daniel's action is perfectly natural and in keeping with the situation.³¹ Having been refused permission for a permanent change in diet, Daniel naturally took the next step of attempting a brief trial. As Montgomery points out, "An underling might grant the boon without fear of discovery."³² The chief steward, not being in as close or responsible a position as Ashpenaz in relation to the king, could afford to take a chance.

The trial was 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 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."³³ Miller suggests the word would include "not only vegetables but fruits, grains, and bread that is made from grains."³⁴ 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 appearance should be examined and judgment rendered accordingly.³⁵ The steward granted their request, and the test was begun.

DANIEL'S REQUEST GRANTED (1:15–16)

1:15–16 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

After the ten days, Daniel and his companions were clearly in better health than those who had eaten the king's food. Although God's blessing was on these young men, 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)

1:17–21 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

These verses are an amazing summary of the three years of hard study and the result of God's blessing upon the four faithful young men. By the time they completed their education, Daniel and his three friends were probably nearly twenty years of age. In addition to their natural intellectual ability and their evident careful attention to their studies, God added His grace. The definite article precedes the name of God (v. 17), indicating that the true God of Israel was the one who was responsible for their success.

The words used to describe the men's knowledge and skills indicate that they not only had a thorough understanding of the learning of the Chaldeans, but that they had insight into its true meaning (cf. James 1:5). Calvin is probably wrong that they were kept from study of the religious superstitions and magic that characterized the Chaldeans.³⁶ 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 also discernment.

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.”³⁷

Although all four youths were skilled in Chaldean learning and were able to separate the true from the false, only Daniel had understanding “in all visions and dreams.” This was not an incidental remark but a fact necessary to understand Daniel’s role as a prophet in later chapters. In this, Daniel differed from his companions as a true prophet. His ability to interpret visions and dreams primarily related to 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 beyond.

Daniel’s capacity included distinguishing a significant 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 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.³⁸ To no other was the broad expanse of both Gentile and Hebrew futures revealed with the same precision.

The four young captives’ three-year period of preparation ends with a personal interview before Nebuchadnezzar. 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, proved to be far superior to the king’s own “magicians and enchanters.” 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 a matter-of-fact way and was so evidently due to the grace of God that Daniel is delivered from the charge of boasting. Their upright

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, was quick to respond to these bright young minds.

Chapter 1 concludes with the simple statement that Daniel continued until 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 imply that Daniel did not continue after the first year of Cyrus—which, as a matter of fact, he did. A similar expression is used to describe Jeremiah's ministry extending "until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah" (Jer. 1:3), even though Jeremiah 40–43 show his ministry extending beyond that time. In both instances the phrase indicates that the prophet's ministry extended through the period in question, without implying that the ministry ended with that period.

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.³⁹ 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."⁴⁰ This is, however, an arbitrary change in the text. Though the events of chapter 2 likely follow chronologically after the end of chapter 1, the test at the end of the three-year period only demonstrated proficiency in study, not ability to interpret dreams as in chapter 2.

In a society that equated age with wisdom, four newly appointed sages, even if they did graduate at the top of their class, would still be considered inferior to the king's senior advisors. 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. As will be pointed out in the discussion of Daniel 2:1, it is also 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. If so, this would answer objections to the statement of Daniel 1:20, as it would place 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 occurs in the context of Israel's captivity and apostasy. Certainly Daniel would not have been recognized as a prophet of God and a channel of divine revelation if he had not been a man of prayer and uncompromising moral character, whom God could honor fittingly. Daniel and his companions represent the godly remnant of Israel that 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.

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 believers everywhere facing trials and temptation.

NOTES

1. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 202.
2. Hayim Tadmor, "Chronicle of the Last Kings of Judah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 15 (October 1956), 227.
3. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1949), 47–54.
4. D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings (626–556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1961), 20–26.
5. Finegan, *Handbook*, 194–201.

6. Edwin R. Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 166.
7. A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (1970; repr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 99.
8. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 38.
9. Siegfried H. Horn, *Seventh Day Adventist Dictionary of the Bible* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1960), 83.
10. Young, *Daniel*, 39.
11. Flavius Josephus, *Complete Works of Flavius Josephus*, William Whiston, trans. (repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 222.
12. Young, *Daniel*, 39.
13. James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), 3.
14. Robert Henry Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), 7.
15. In his discussion, Leupold observes correctly, “Critics should use uncertain terms with proper caution” (Leupold, *Daniel*, 59).
16. L. Oppenheim, “Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts,” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., James Pritchard, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 308.
17. Montgomery, *Daniel*, 127.
18. Leupold, *Daniel*, 62. See Montgomery, *Daniel*, 127–28 for a complete discussion; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 834.
19. Young, *Daniel*, 42.
20. The privilege of sitting at the king’s table is discussed by Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, John McHugh, trans. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 120–23.
21. For more reasons why Ezekiel 14:14, 20 refer to Daniel the prophet see the comments on Ezekiel 14:12–20 in Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1,253–54.
22. Young, *Daniel*, 274.
23. Carl Friedrich Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, M. G. Easton, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 79; Young, *Daniel*, 43.
24. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 83.
25. Goldingay gives seven possible reasons why Daniel and his friends would have considered the food to be defiling. John Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds. (Dallas: Word, 1989), 18.
26. Cf. Judith 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, *Daniel*, 130).
27. Young, *Daniel*, 45.
28. Leupold credits Kliefoth with expressing this concept. Leupold, *Daniel*, 66.
29. Montgomery, *Daniel*, 131.

30. Cf. Leupold, *Daniel*, 70; Keil, *Daniel*, 81.
31. Young, *Daniel*, 45–46.
32. Montgomery, *Daniel*, 131. See also René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook on Daniel*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 20, who write, “Having failed to get Ashpenaz to agree to his proposal, Daniel goes to a lesser official.”
33. Young, *Daniel*, 46; cf. Montgomery, *Daniel*, 132.
34. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 69.
35. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 1, Thomas Myers, trans. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1852), 105.
36. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, 1:112.
37. Keil, *Daniel*, 83.
38. 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, *Daniel*, 132). Montgomery rejects, of course, a sixth-century B.C. date for Daniel, well before the last of the prophets. For refutation, see Young, *Daniel*, 49–50.
39. Young, *Daniel*, 52–53.
40. Charles, *Daniel*, 12.