

Dare to Understand Daniel

“Observe What You See”

^{ESV} Daniel 1:1 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 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.

³ 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,

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

¹³ 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."

¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

(Daniel 1:1-21)

A Year Unlike Any Other

Today is August 23, 2020. We are beginning a new series on the book of Daniel. I'm always curious as to what

draws me to one book vs. another and in this case, I thought it would be relevant to explain. I begin with the date for a reason. For the last half-year, we (meaning the entire earth, not just Americans) have been living through some rather unusual times, to say the least. Imagine if you will, that I were talking to you in August of last year and that I would tell you how in 2020 the following will happen:

- An impeachment will be attempted by using an argument that will later turn out to be not only completely false, but actually the very thing the impeachers did against the president
- Kobe and a bunch of kids will be burned to death in a helicopter, something that seems oddly to have been predicted in cartoons and commercials from years earlier.
- Ricky Gervais will “jokingly “call out most of Hollywood as pedophile human traffickers at the Golden Globes
- The entire world will be shut down because of a virus
- Tens of thousands of prisoners, many of them violent and under life sentences, will be simply let out of prisons around the country by state governors without any media coverage as soon as the shutdown begins, but people who will try to open their barber shops and gyms will be thrown into prison because they will dare to open during the same disease
- Stores will run out of toilet paper and then food

- There will be a shortage of coins as cash currency
- Your children will not be allowed to go outside and play in their local park
- You will not be allowed to go to your own mother's funeral
- Several state governors will knowingly send infected patients back to their nursing homes though there are plenty of hospital beds available, and more than 40% of all known deaths from the virus will occur in them
- Most business and churches will be forced to close, strip clubs and abortion centers can stay open
- Masks will be forced upon the population even after it turns out the disease will kill less people than pneumonia
- Testing for this disease will show positives in monkeys, fruit, and totally unused swabs, and this testing will then be promoted as necessary for anyone coming down with even a fever
- Dozens of cities will burn to the ground through rioting
- Once allowed go back in minimal numbers, many Christians will not be allowed to sing in their churches, but rioters and looters will be encouraged to yell and scream all day long
- The media will encourage looting and burning of businesses, calling them "peaceful protests"
- Parts of American cities will be taken over and called autonomous zones (i.e. their own sovereign nation)

- People will be calling for the end of all police in the nation and massive defunding will be undertaken in major cities

Would you have believed me? Because of these and so many more, many people are asking me whether I think we are entering the **Great Tribulation**, whether **the Antichrist** is here and, whether **Jesus is coming back** in the near future.

The eschatology I grew up with was also probably the most well-known in the popular culture. It is called Dispensationalism. Of the many passages that deal with these prophecies (as they understand it), Revelation and Daniel have to be the two “go-to” resources, but today is not the day to talk more about that. **Because** this is such a crazy year, **because** I keep getting asked questions like this, and perhaps most importantly **because** I sense that so many people are wandering lost and lonely and worried and confused and fearful in these days, I believe a study of Daniel could be the perfect remedy, not because it answers these questions the way I used to believe or the way people might want, but because this book, maybe more than any other, is **obsessed with God’s absolute sovereignty** over this world during times of world upheaval. Good or bad, for better or for worse, God is on his throne, always. Infinitely more than

needing to have dates for the end times, this may be a Christian's most pressing need of the hour, especially when you understand that in this midst of this sovereignty is one of the most overtly Christ-centered books of the entire Old Testament. And it is through Jesus Christ alone that God's sovereignty becomes a comforting rather than terrifying doctrine.

Daniel: An Overview

Daniel is a fascinating book, both **theologically** and **literarily**. If we want to understand the theology to the best degree possible, we need to see a little of the book as a piece of unsurpassed literary brilliance. This will teach us a bit of what to look for and how to read it properly.

Author and Date

The book centers on **Daniel**, a prophet of Israel who is lead away into captivity into Babylon in the sixth century B.C. It begins when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem “**in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim**” the son of Josiah (**Dan 1:1**). This was approximately the year **605 B.C.** The

final date mentioned is “the third year of Cyrus king of Persia” (Dan 10:1). This is 537 B.C. Thus, we have a span of nearly seventy years of Daniel’s life, which also overlaps with the famous seventy years of Babylonian captivity (Jer 25:12; Dan 9:2). He lived through the whole thing.

Throughout chs. 8-12, we have several statements in the first person such as, “I, Daniel ...” (8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:5). This leads us to think that Daniel was the author and that it was composed over the course of his lifetime. However, there are complications with this idea. To understand them, we have to look at both the original language of the book and its genre (type of literature).

Genre

Let’s look at the *genre* first. It is difficult to decide if it is one genre or two. Some people classify the entire book as *apocalyptic*, which is a unique form of communication that portrays the end (of a king, of an age, of the world). Often, when we think of apocalyptic, we think bizarre images of fantasy (like beasts with multiple heads) and horror (like ... beasts with multiple heads!). But within this genre there is

also history. We can break the book up into two main parts in this regard:

Chapters 1-6 = Historical Stories

Chapter 7-12 = Prophecies

This isn't completely accurate, because there are certainly prophecies in chs. 1-6 and there is certainly an element of story in chs. 7-12. But generally speaking, this is how the book is ordered. So, as far as genre is concerned, we can call this either a book of apocalyptic with a sub-genre of historical apocalyptic or we can think of it as hero stories and apocalyptic visions and prophecies.¹

There are a couple of reasons **why this matters**. First, we are not reading poetry or proverbs or letters to churches. So, our **interpretation** has to match the kind of literature we are in. As far as apocalyptic literature goes, what we are looking at is “**the revelation of secrets concerning future events of history or other hidden information about the divine operation of the cosmos**” where the revelation is being

¹ The former is **John J. Collins**, *Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature Volume XX, ed. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), latter is how the Ryken's divide it up in **Leland Ryken & Philip Graham Ryken**, *The Literary Study Bible: ESV* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2007).

“communicated through the medium of a vision to a seer.”²
The visions are often bizarre and those images are meant to be representations of other things; they are not to be taken literalistically. Second, though a tale may be told as a hero story, this does not mean that it didn’t happen in history. Daniel is a real person (Ezek 14:20; 28:3;³ Mat 24:15; Heb 11:33-34).

Original Language

Turning to the question of language, Daniel is unique among biblical literature, save for the book of Ezra, in that it is written in not one language, but two. And we aren’t talking about little phrases here and there either. Furthermore, the way this breaks down is rather curious and, on the surface, inexplicable. Interestingly, while we have six chapters of stories and six of prophecies (roughly speaking), we also have, roughly speaking, six chapters written in Hebrew and six chapter written in Aramaic.

² G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1984), 6.

³ A short essay on why this is the Biblical Daniel is, “Is The ‘Daniel’ of Ezekiel 28 The Same Person As The Book of Daniel?” The Gospel of Christ, <https://thegospelofchrist.com/knowledge-base/tgoc-kb--gnzs2>.

Aramaic is in the same family of languages as Hebrew but was vastly more widespread. In fact, if we trace the world's most wide-spread languages back from English to Latin to Greek, the next farthest back would be Aramaic. It was spoken from Egypt to Babylon and everywhere in between. The Babylonians also used **Akkadian** and were in this way a lot like Canada with two official languages rather than one,⁴ but at this date, this was their language for formal correspondence.

Returning to the six and six chapters in the two languages, it is important to note that they are **not the same six chapters as before**. Rather, they are one off:

Chapters 1, 8-12 = Hebrew (technically it is 1:1-2:4a)

Chapter 2-7 = Aramaic (technically it is 2:4b-7:28)

So the question becomes, why should this be the case? It is here **that Liberal scholars** have a field day with the date and authorship. They argue that Aramaic would have been

⁴ This partially explains (besides the fact that they spoke Hebrew) why Jeremiah would say of the Babylonian, “**I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say**” (**Jer 5:15**). Charles makes the point that some Jews would have known Aramaic, but would not have known Babylonian. See Walter F. Adeney and **R. H. Charles**, eds., *The Book of Daniel: Notes*, The New-Century Bible (New York; Edinburgh: Henry Frowde; T. C. & E. C. Jack; Oxford University Press, post 1929), xxiii.

the language of second century B.C. Jews living in Israel and, combined with prophecies that seem too precise to have been predicted before the fact, date the book **400 years after Daniel lived**.⁵ In turn, many of them think that he is a figure of pure fiction, that he never existed, and that the book was written mostly to help Jews deal with the horrors happening in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.

There are **lots of problems** with this. Here are just **three**. **First**, Jesus (and Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.11.7.276) takes some of the prophecies here as being his own future, not the past. **Second**, how could you possibly get away with writing a book about “prophecy” just a year or two after the events it describes happened in the name of an ancient hero who never existed, about events that were supposedly predicted hundreds of years ago but no one ever knew about, much less how could it have it be considered canon almost immediately? **Finally**, even this late of a date still has to deal with the predictions of the Romans taking over the Greeks, which means prophecy really does exist in this book, even by their own late dating. If not those, why not others?⁶

⁵ They also suggest that apocalyptic as a genre could not have existed in the sixth century B.C.

⁶ For more on this see **Jay Rogers**, *In the Days of These Kings: The Book of Daniel in Preterist Perspective* (Clermont, FL: Mesia House International, 2017), 27-32.

There are a couple of facts we must not overlook. First, the book itself sets the stage for a date and authorship at the time of Daniel at the very beginning when it tells us that the king commanded his chief eunuch to bring some of the Israelite royal family and nobility “to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (Dan 1:4) and furthermore that “God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom” (17). There is no other literature in this book, so why mention it unless it helps you understand that *they* would write this book? Second, and complementary to it, what possible reason would someone writing in the second century B.C. have of using two different languages? It makes no sense.

But we can make good sense of this if the book is actually being written during the exile in Babylon to the Jews both there and back home. For they are in two different places living in two very different worlds. Rogers explains...

This sudden shift from Hebrew to “Chaldee” or “Chaldean Aramaic” can be likened to the dialog in a modern movie that takes place in a foreign country, such as Russia or Germany. For realism sake, the script writers begin with the foreign language and the film provides subtitles. But at a

certain point the film shifts to English to make the viewing experience easier for the movie goer. Although this may seem like a trite analogy, the “story-teller” aspect of the historical narrative is meant to captivate the reader. Read aloud, the dramatic shift into Chaldee would lend a sense of realism and immanence for contemporary Jewish audiences.

Since nearly all Jews after the restoration period spoke both Chaldean Aramaic and Hebrew, the first chapter of Daniel, which contains the story of the prophet, is told in Hebrew to establish the point of view of Daniel/Belteshazzar as a young captive among King Nebuchadnezzar’s royal prisoners from Jerusalem. Then the narrative shifts to the common tongue of the Post-Exile era Jews, Chaldean Aramaic. Then when the book shifts to the prophecies concerning the later kingdoms – Medo-Persia, Macedonia-Greece and Rome – the prophet uses Hebrew, which was the language of all other prophetic books possessing the authority of Scripture.⁷

Original Language

This takes us to [the outline and structure](#) of the book. We’ve already seen that we can break it into two halves, with the first half dealing with story material and the second

⁷ Rogers, 26.

with prophecy and you can outline the book pretty straightforwardly according to our chapter divisions. However, it is important to know that the [Aramaic material forms a very deliberate chiasm](#) which is noted by almost all commentators.

Chapter 2 –

**A – Four World Empires:
Neb’s Metal Statue**

Chapter 3 –

**B – Hebrew Children in the
Fiery Furnace**

Chapter 4 –

**C – Prophecy to
Nebuchadnezzar - Lives**

Chapter 4:37 – **Repentance**

**D – Acknowledgment of
God’s Sovereignty**

Chapter 5 –

**C¹ – Prophecy to
Belshazzar - Dies**

Chapter 6 –

**B¹ – Daniel in the Lion’s
Den**

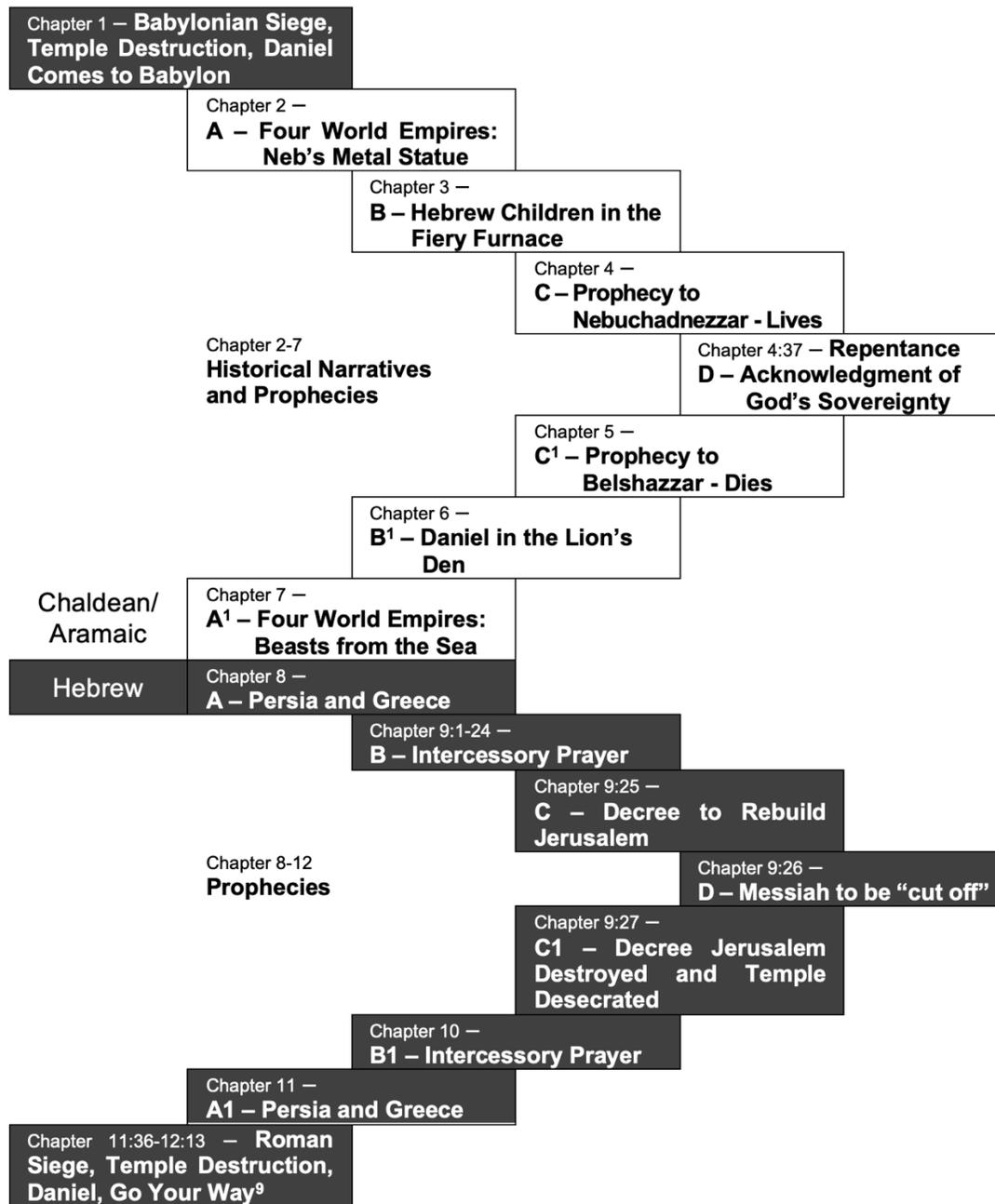
Chapter 7 –

**A¹ – Four World Empires:
Beasts from the Sea**

This means that there is a larger purpose here than merely telling isolated stories. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why several other tiny books (which are really more like chapters) made it into the LXX of Daniel, but never into the Hebrew.⁸

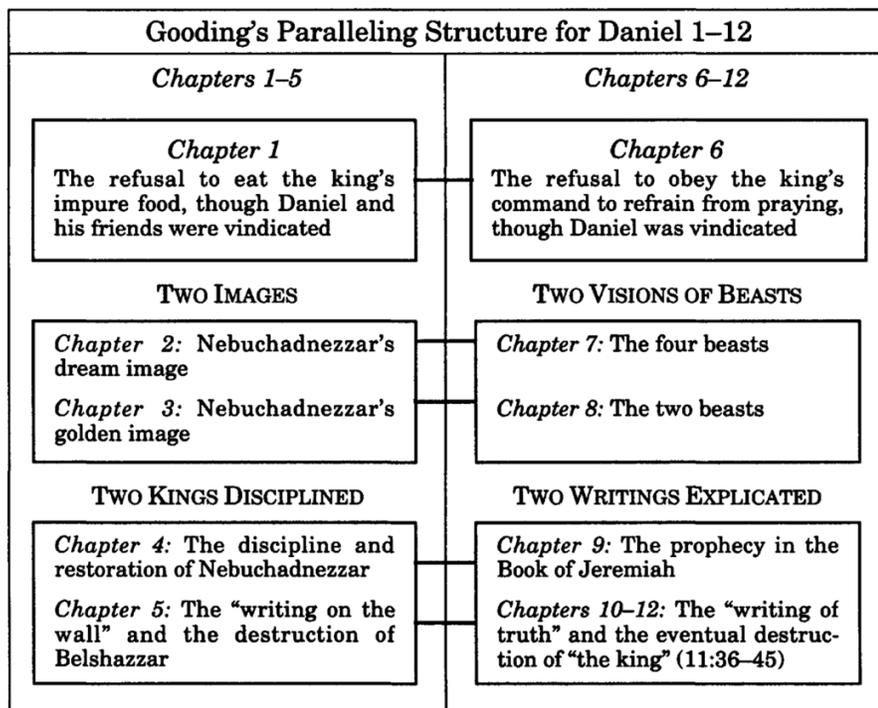
⁸ These are the [Prayer of Azariah](#), the [Song of the Three Jews](#), [Susanna](#), and [Bel and the Dragon](#). “The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews are found in all Greek versions between Dan 3.23 and 3.24. The Septuagint locates the other two Additions at the end of the

Curiously, there is a second large chiasm that takes up the remaining Hebrew portions:



book of Daniel, after 12.13; Theodotion's version places Susanna at the opening of the book of Daniel, and Bel and the Dragon at the conclusion of ch 6. Other ancient versions follow Theodotion's order. The NRSV follows Theodotion's text but places the Additions by themselves in the Apocrypha rather than integrating them into the text." *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha New Revised Standard Version Augmented Third Edition: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 188.

Another Way to Outline Daniel



Fanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," BibSac 160 (July-Sept 2003): 2
<http://www.reformed.org/English/HTML/Pub/Articles/Lit/20Struc%20of%20Dan%20-%20P%20Fanner.pdf>

This means that the book is and always has been a single, brilliantly woven unit of thought that has **two centers**. These take us to the central theological points of the book. First, that **God is absolutely sovereign** over the affairs of kings, even to the point of being able to bring them to repentance. Second, that **the Messiah** would be "cut off" from the land of the living in the coming future. We know, this side of it, that these two centers form one cohesive whole. The God who is sovereign over kings and brings repentance does so through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ who becomes the King of kings at his resurrection and ascension. This is all proven through some of the most detailed and specific prophecy

found anywhere in the Bible. And These things take us back to the opening thoughts about why I have decided to preach through this book at this time.

Daniel 1: Exiles in Babylon

Today we will look at [the first chapter](#). It tells the story of how four Jews—a youthful [Daniel](#) and his [three young friends](#)—came to be in the courts of Babylon. Put another way, it tells a story about living in exile, far from home, displaced because of war, and how they dealt with the new customs of their capturer who was their enemy. It serves as the [introduction](#) to the book, a book which will end, by the way, with Daniel being told to “[go your way](#),” a free man until he dies at a ripe old age, thus taking us out of Babylon to the eternal glories of the resurrection, the great hope of all the saints.

Something to note up front is that this chapter forms its own tightly woven and very deliberate chiasm, which means that it has a central theme, which we will come to soon enough.

- A. “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah” (1-2)
- B. “Wisdom” “Understanding” (3-4)
- C. “They were to stand before the king” (5).
- D. “Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (6)
- E. “Prince of the Eunuchs gave names” (four new names) (7)
- F. “The king’s food ... the wine that he drank” (8)
- G. “The king, who assigned your food” (9-10a)
- H. “Your faces looking more haggard than the youths” (10b NAS)
- I. “Test your servants for ten days” (11-12)
- J. **“Observe ... deal with your servants according to what you see” (13)**
- I¹. “Tested them for ten days” (14)
- H¹. “They were better in appearance” (15a)
- G¹. “The king’s food” (15b)
- F¹. “Took away their food and the wine they were to drink” (16)
- E¹. “These four youths, God gave them knowledge ... and wisdom” (17)
- D¹. “Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (18-19a)
- C¹. “They stood before the king” (19b)
- B¹. “Wisdom and understanding” (20)
- A¹. “The first year of king Cyrus” (21)

To see how the story comes back in on itself, remember how we have seen that [the setting of the chapter](#) is in the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign and that Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Babylon ([Dan 1:1](#)). The chapter ends with Daniel being there

until the first year of King Cyrus (**Dan 1:21**). Thus, **two kings bookend the chapter**.

As the story unfolds, we see that **Jehoiakim**, who is the son of the last good king of Judah, Josiah, is in his third year as king. **2Kgs 23:34** tells us that his name was originally **Eliakim**, but that Pharaoh Neco changed it to Jehoiakim. The names mean the same thing, except “Eli” is a form of “God” while “Jeho” is the root of Yahweh. So his name means “**the LORD will rise up.**”

This poor king inherited a world of **disaster**, which only got worse. His days were very challenging. Egypt had **taken** the previous king, Jehoahaz into Egypt where he died. Jehoiakim was forced to pay tribute to the Pharaoh who **taxed** the land heavily (**35**). He reigned eleven years in Jerusalem, meaning that he was not sent away to Babylon with Daniel and his friends. But in his third year, suddenly, the great world power, Babylon and king Nebuchadnezzar, **attacked** (with Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites; **2Kg 24:1-5**), and the first of the **exiles** were taken out of Israel.

Nebuchadnezzar could mean “Nebo is the god of fire,”⁹ or “No God but the king,”¹⁰ both of which foreshadow stories to come. He was the second king of the Chaldean dynasty of Babylonia, builder of the fabled Hanging Gardens, and reigned 43 years (605 – 562 B.C.). Daniel says that when he came into Jerusalem, he *took some of the vessels of the Temple* (Dan 1:2), which surely had been made in the days of Moses himself. He brought them to the land of Shinar, which is mentioned because this is where they built the tower of Babel (Gen 11:2). They are not going to a good place. To make matters worse, he brought them to the temple of his own god and placed them in the treasury. You can't get any more blasphemous and profane than this. This was not just plundering; it was an assault on God himself. Nebuchadnezzar is saying that his god is more powerful than the Jewish God and he proves it this way.

This is oldest conflict there is, appearing at the beginning of the Bible when the LORD predicts, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). This is seen better in the next verse.

⁹ Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998).

¹⁰ F. E. Bunnett, *Etymology Made Easy* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1856), 117.

After this introduction setting the stage for a battle of the gods, the king commands **Ashpenaz** (possibly “**horses nose**” or “**inn keeper**”), who is the chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel who are *part of the royal family and nobility* (3). This means Daniel is **from the tribe of Judah** and related to the kings of Israel, and this takes us back to the seed prophecy. The stage is being set right away for holy war. Who will win?

It is at this point that **Sinclair Ferguson** calls the next few verses, “**Brainwashing**,” and he spells out four ways it occurs, noting that these are the strategies Satan uses in spiritual warfare in **Eph 6:10-20**.¹¹ The first is *isolation*. It tells us that he took, “**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**” (**Dan 1:4**). They are being taken away from all the influences that would mold them into the character of the LORD and put into an anti-Christian context. Notice the language of “blemish” and “appearance.” Even in a pagan court, priestly ideas such as

¹¹ **Sinclair B. Ferguson** and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Daniel*, vol. 21, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1988), 23-32.

we find in Leviticus about physical purity were present. This is a hint that the king seeks to place them in a **new religious context**—service to foreign gods.

Second, we have *indoctrination*. They have to be young, so they are **impressionable**. They have to be smart, and so they can be **teachable**. And what will they be taught? The culture and stories, the language and ways, and even the religion of the Chaldeans. They would learn Akkadian and Aramaic and all the cultural treasures they could yield.

Third is *compromise* or temptation. “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” (5). Here we have bribes in the form of **pleasure and luxury**—the king’s **palace**, the king’s **food**, the king’s **wine** ... that should make them convert. **However, the food is also unclean and forbidden to a Jew.**

Then we have the capper. Ferguson calls it *confusion*, I might call it assimilation. We are introduced to **the heroes** of our story. “Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah” (6). But these will not be the names you know most of them by. We read next, “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” (7).

It is helpful to look at the meanings of these names. Daniel means “Judge of God” as in “one who delivers judgment in the name of God.” His name is changed to “Bel, protect his life.” Bel is the shortened form of Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. One of the famous apocryphal stories that we find in the LXX of Daniel is Bel and the Dragon, titled after this god. Though Marduk bears similarities to Zeus in that he is the god who defeats the pantheon of gods to rise above them all, scholars both old and new have sometimes identified him with Nimrod, the legendary giant and builder of Babel.¹² To a Christian it would be like changing his name from Judge of God to Satan, Protect Him or perhaps Goliath protect him.

Hananiah means “Yahweh is gracious.” He becomes Shadrach, which is a perversion of Marduk. Mishael means “Who is what God is?” His name is changed to Meshach or “Who is what (the god) Aku is.” Azariah means, “Helped of Yahweh.” Abednego means “Servant of Nebo/Nabu.” In other words, every name is changed from something having

¹² K. van der Toorn and P. W. van der Horst, “Nimrod Before and After the Bible,” *HTR* 83:1 (1990): 8-9, 16.

to do with the God of Israel to the gods of Babylon. This is wicked. It is assimilation at its finest. It would make the Star Trek Borg proud, if they could be proud that is.

Names in Daniel 1			
Eliakim (2Kg 23:34)	Whom God sets up; i.e., establishes and causes to stand; God will raise up	Jehoiakim (Dan 1:1)	The LORD will set up; Jehovah has set up; the LORD will rise up.
		Nebuchadnezzar	Nebo is the god of fire
		Ashpenaz	Horse's nose (possibly "inn keeper")
Daniel (Dan 1:6)	Judge of God; i.e., one who delivers judgment in the name of God	Belteshazzar (Dan 1:7)	Bel, protect his life; the lord's leader.
Hananiah	Jehovah is gracious; gift of the LORD	Shadrach	Perversion of Marduk
Mishael	Who is what God is	Meshach	Who is what Aku is?
Azariah	Helped of the LORD; whom Jehovah aids; Jehovah is keeper; Jehovah has helped.	Abednego	Servant or worshipper of Nebo. ¹³

Vs. 8 introduces us to **the first true battle in the book**, and there are many. **“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.”** Notice two things here. On one hand, **Daniel is resolute**. He is a follower of Yahweh, not Bel. He decided in this midst of all this temptation to give up his faith, that he will not defile himself with unclean food

¹³ Found in **Smith and Cornwall**, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names*; *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel **Freedman** (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1150; *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. **F. F. Bruce** (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1979), 854.

and probably with wine dedicated to the gods which would have been a defilement to him. On the other, he is **not bucking the authority over him** (yet), even though they are his enemies! He goes through the proper chain of command, even though as Calvin says, **he is risking his own head in doing so**. He takes his case to the Ashpenaz.

That this was nevertheless a bold move is made clear in the next verse, which tells us “**God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs**” (9). This is the **second time that the True God has done something** in this chapter. The Lord (Adonai) gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand (2), and now God (Elohim) made Daniel favorable in the eyes of the chief.¹⁴ Already, we are seeing that though Babylon is doing all it can to suppress him, to minimize him, to denigrate him, God never goes away. He is in control of all things, big and small. This is such an important lesson to learn, especially in situations where he seems to be missing in action and incapable of helping.

Nevertheless, we still don’t see it right away. “**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**

¹⁴ The name Yahweh only appears in ch. 9 in Daniel.

that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king” (10). He doesn’t know it yet, but his fear is misplaced. Nebuchadnezzar may be the most powerful man on the planet, but he is not the one who should be feared.

Daniel decides not to press the matter with the chief; a wise move. He talks instead to a lower official, a warden. “Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (11). Notice how it gives us their Hebrew names! They won’t compromise either! What does he ask him?

“Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink” (12). Ten days is, “A relatively short time. The period of ten days for a spiritual trial is a common motif in the literature of the time (cf. Rev 2:10; Jubilees 19:8; Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Joseph 2:7; Pirke Abot 5:4).”¹⁵ Just here, I need to point something out. Several years ago, a fad diet ran through the Evangelical world based on this verse. They call it The Daniel Diet. The idea is that you eat only vegetables and waters, because that’s Daniel’s diet, and since we all know

¹⁵ Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary on Chapters 1-9*, vol. 23, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 130.

that the Bible exist to be a cookbook, this is probably God's best short-term diet for our bodies.

While I can appreciate *the desire to be healthy*, and we know today that such a diet for ten days would be very good for you, the problem I have with such a thing is that *it makes the real point at best only a subpoint*, while it elevates that which isn't really even an actual point to the main point. This verse is not added here so that you can do God's ordained diet. *This isn't about you*. Yes, the diet itself is fine. Feel free to try it. But you don't need to have a Bible verse as your stamp of approval in order to do that. This is one of the more unfortunate things about Evangelical hermeneutics these days. It doesn't know how to read the Scripture properly. It almost always makes it about us, even when it isn't about us, and it often does this by turning what is supposed to be good news and the gospel into laws and rules and duties that we have to follow and obey.

Daniel is clearly *telling this warden to test them* for a short period of time to see if they really do need the king's food to keep them strong and healthy. Fasts like this usually make you weaker, not stronger. But this verse is only the first half of Daniel's request. And, in fact, it isn't the most important part of it.

We know this because if you skip vs. 13 for a moment and move to the next verse, the number “10” returns, signaling that the chiasm is working its way back out. “So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days” (14). If we compared the pairings, we would see that these kinds of repetitions will appear in almost every verse from here on out. That means that it is the second half of the request that is the truly important part.

Daniel says, “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” (13). The testing with food has as its purpose the warden observing them and judging them accordingly. Look and see for yourself what our God will do for us. He will take care of us and your king will have no problem with his servants because of this. But he will have to see it to believe it. He can only be shown. It is curious that Daniel means “Judge of God” and here he is telling the warden to judge them based on this test. It is a deliberate flip, having a godless Gentile make a judgment based upon what he sees, a judgment that he does not fully realize will be rooted in seeing how their God actually takes care of them. If God

takes care of them, then may the warden treat them well and, hopefully, come to fear the right King.

He takes the deal. He **tests them for ten days (14)** and at the end of it he sees that **“they are better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s food” (15)**. This is a twist, because even though a diet like this would be good for you, there is no reason why teen-aged boys, growing and so full of energy, should gain weight on it! This is a diet people today take *to lose weight*, thus showing how badly the point is being missed. That point is, God is taking care of them! He is superintending over them for some as of yet unknown purpose. He’s doing it in the palace of the archenemy of the Old Testament even as they are being tempted to compromise their faith and renounce their God. But God takes care of his own and he has the power above all gods to do it.

Vs. **16** shows what happened after his judgment. He **“took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.”** Though their **names were changed**, though they were supposed to **defile themselves** with the unclean food of the enemy king, though they had been **taken** out of their land as slaves against their will, they never forsook their God and God never left them, even in the

hostile enemies impregnable fortress. Because their God, our God, is omnipresent. And he gave them favor even in the enemies camp.

Why would he help them? Obviously, we could give theological reasons like he is **gracious** or he was **acting faithfully** to their faith and so on. But the text tells us something more. “**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**” (17). This parallels earlier where we learned that the king chose them because of their wisdom and intelligence.

But there are some other important things to say here. *God* gave them learning and skill here. In other words, **God was making them strong because he had a purpose for them in a foreign land**. And that purpose is actually something that runs contrary to a way a lot of “good Christians” think about culture and religion. God was preserving them so that they could learn the religion of the Babylonians! But I thought that was evil? It is! But that doesn’t mean God’s people shouldn’t understand it or learn about it or know what it is all about. How can you be wise as serpents if you don’t know anything about the enemy?

Think about it. They were being **indoctrinated for three years** in the heart of Babylonian *paganism*. This was not being done in a Christian church by Christian pastors who carefully helped them understand at which points it was wrong. They were being taught by the sages of this paganism itself. They were being taught that this is the right way to view the world, that their origin stories like **Marduk** and Tiamat was the real creation story, that **Gilgamesh** not Noah was the real Flood Hero, that **Hammurabi** not Moses was the lawgiver, and so on.

But it was even more than learning their stories and history and politics and economics and law and wisdom literature. It says, “**And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams**” (17). Almost every chapter in the rest of the book will unfold this in its own attack on Babylonian religion. That’s important, because Daniel will never compromise the True Religion with the forgeries. But you have to let the text speak. In chapter 1, we are to gather that **he learned this by studying in the Babylonian court!** Think of that. Later, this becomes overt when Daniel is called “**chief of the magicians**” of Babylon (**Dan 4:9; 5:11**).

That’s an incredible thought, and one that is subversive to a view of culture that says you have to Christianize

everything and live in a Christian bubble. That simply wasn't possible for Daniel. He had no choice. Earlier Christians such as the Reformers and Puritans and Church Fathers read broadly and widely from classical non-Christian literature and, like Paul and Daniel, they used it subversively to tell people within their own context the truth about the Living God and of his Christ. Daniel 1 is encouraging us that this is not evil, but even if others intend it as such. Through it all, God was with him, preserving him from idolatry and worshiping other gods. God had other plans for him.¹⁶

Well, the time came for their studies to be over. Nebuchadnezzar was now going to discover whether his investment would pay off. “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”

¹⁶ **Going Deeper.** it is also one that I believe accounts for how the wise men of the east knew to come to Bethlehem when the Messiah was born, for this same Daniel never gave up his belief in Yahweh or his love of the Scriptures and he surely would have told them about a “star” being born, coming out of Jacob (Num 24:17) and that he would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), and so on. Of all the peoples who have ever lived, it is the Babylonians who knew the signs of the heavens enough to read them and come to pay homage to Daniel's God when the time came. But that's for another time.

(18-19). Again, we are given **their Hebrew names!** They were still Jews; they had not converted. Their God had in fact taken care of them, and though the king does not know it, we know that they didn't have to compromise their religious convictions and that God had so blessed them that all four men now rose to the top of class.

As they stood before the king, he grilled them on every manner of subjects. **“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”** (20). This means they learned it all, from the law code to the astrology of the ancients, from the epic sagas to the arts of healing. I'm not saying anything other than what the text says in singling out **“the magicians and enchanters”** in the kingdom. The story ends happily. Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus, that is 538 B.C.

Mentioning Cyrus here skips two other kings that we will find in the book: **Belshazzar** and **Darius**. It does this to show us that **Daniel lived a long life** in the court, nearly 70 years. If this were the only story we had of him, we might think that God blessed him and his friends with **no difficulties or suffering** at all. They stood in their time of

testing here and now it was all about health, wealth, and prosperity in a palace. **But you and I know that isn't the case.**

As he thinks about this story, **Spurgeon** give a couple things to think about.¹⁷ First, there are *temptations to be resisted*. Temptations are called that because they actually tempt you. We saw how the king tried with all his might to get them to leave their faith and God behind, but they resisted. There are *right methods of resisting temptation*. Daniel purposed in his heart. You have to do this ahead of time. He knew what was right and wrong, he weighed the matter thoroughly, and he settled on it. He said to himself that whatever they made him learn, he would not forsake the Most High. It was no accident that he came out a believer; he resolved it early on in his heart. When he had the chance, he went through the proper channels to avoid compromising with God's law, but he would not have compromised, even if God had not given him favor to the warden. He would deny himself for the sake of his God.

There are few more points I want to bring out. They are related to Spurgeon's. First, because this is such a controversial idea among some of the branches of

¹⁷ **Charles Spurgeon**, "Dare to be a Daniel," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 39 (Jan 15, 1893), <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/dare-to-be-a-daniel/#flipbook/>.

Christianity that are close to us, *you really can be in the world but not of it*. We are not called to live in Christian bubbles, only have Christian friends, only listen to Christian music, and work for only Christian companies. Daniel and his friends prove this. But again, like Daniel, to avoid falling into the trap, *you must set your face like flint* and resolve that as you engage with the world, you will not forsake the God who has called you. That's your responsibility in this midst of his sovereign election.

Second, you have to learn to *trust God when you are surrounded by the enemy*. You need not fear being in their world, learning their customs, being employed in their service. What you need to fear is God and keep that fear of God before your eyes, not compromising who you are even when the world tries to force such compromise upon you externally in every imaginable way. You can learn, and not relinquish; you can study and not submit; you can lead and not compromise. But it takes a strong faith that the God you worship is real, is all-powerful, and most of all, that he loves you in Christ.

The lesson that *God is in control of the affairs of all things* and that he looks after his people, whether it be in giving them wisdom and skill in employment, preservation

in a foreign land, a purpose to influence others towards the true God, or in bringing the curses of the covenant down upon faithful believers because of the sins of their parents is massive in this chapter and the whole book. God is sovereign. This is a great need of our hour to believe in our hearts.

I would challenge you, as Spurgeon and Ferguson and so many others do with the lyrics of that famous old gospel song,

Dare to be Daniel!

Dare to stand alone!

Dare to have a purpose firm!

Dare to make it known!

God knows **we need Christians now more than ever who will stand in times of great trial and difficulty**. And I don't have a problem encouraging you to do good and noble and godly things in this world. But so much more than that, as important as that may be, I would encourage you to **dare to understand Daniel**, that is the book of Daniel, to, like the warden, *observe what you see here*. That is the heart of our story after all. The story is no a mere moral tale to emulate, but a gospel story to believe. And really, it is only in coming

to know this God for who he is in his all sovereign majesty that anyone could want or seek to live out a life of faith and courage that we see exemplified by this Hero of the church, Daniel, the man of God.

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