

Daniel Chapter One

This chapter sets the *historical* scene and establishes the moral *character* of Daniel. Assuming Daniel was 16-18 years of age when taken into captivity, he would have been born during the revival of Josiah (2 Kings 23). Perhaps the cleansing of the temple and re-institution of the Passover had a lasting spiritual impact on his life. His *righteousness* (Ezekiel 14.14, 20) and *wisdom* (Ezekiel 28.3) was already legendary when only in his thirties. It is a person of such spiritual and moral quality, completely separated from the defiling influence of Babylon and devoted (faithful) to God, to whom the Lord will reveal His mind and will and use in witness for Himself. *Strong: They were in Babylon, but not of it, yet they were a blessing in it, and they were the only persons who cast their souls upon the God of heaven for preservation, and with whom He could have communion. So are we, who are Christ's, in this world!*

The Captivity of Judah [vv.1-2]

v.1: The third year of the reign of Jehoiakim extended from Tishri (September-October) 606BC to Tishri 605BC. Although Jeremiah (25.1) speaks of the same time as the 'fourth year' of Jehoiakim, he was using the Hebrew system of counting the year of accession as the first year of reign. Daniel, using the Babylonian system, did not count the king's year of accession, but from the first day of the succeeding new year. The great battle of Carchemish took place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (May-June 605BC, Jeremiah 46.2) after which Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem in the first of *three* attacks (2 Kings 24.1; 2 Chronicles 36.6-7). He soon hastened to Babylon (in August) following the news his father, Nabopolassar, had died. History suggests Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty king, being a statesman, politician, army commander and architect. He re-built the city of Babylon and designed all its wonders including the air-conditioned hanging gardens. **v.2:** The captivity of Judah and success of Nebuchadnezzar are attributed to the Lord! He *sovereignly* gave (note use of the same word in vv.9, 17) His people into the 'hand' of Nebuchadnezzar. 'Lord' translates *adonay* (equivalent of the Greek *kurios*) meaning sovereign ruler or owner. This was a deliberate, disciplinary and righteous act of God. *Wiersbe: God would rather have His people living in shameful captivity in a pagan land than living like pagans in the Holy Land and disgracing His name.* Time and again Israel had been warned of the consequences of their *disobedience* (Isaiah 24.1-6; Jeremiah 34.12-22), *immorality* and *idolatry* (Jeremiah 7.24-8.3; 44.20-23). The captivity was prophesied to *Josiah* (2 Chronicles 34.23-28), *Hezekiah* (2 Kings 20.17) and *Manasseh* (2 Kings 21.10-15). It is quite incredible that the neo-Babylonian empire rose into existence at the time of Israel's *captivity*, and went out of existence at the time of their *recovery*. The whole empire only lasted about 100 years, and that as a rod in the hand of God. *Habakkuk 1.6, 12: For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, Which shall march through the breadth of the land, To possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs... O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; And, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.* The practical lesson is plain. Judah failed to recognise the chastening hand of God's discipline in their lives and did nothing to change their behaviour (cf. Hebrews 12.11).

The archaic 'Shinar' is employed to remind readers of the *wickedness* and *rebellion* against God associated with such a place (Genesis 10.10; 11.2; Joshua 7.21; Zechariah 5.11). But God's discipline is not only *righteous* but *restrained*, giving 'part' of the vessels of the house of 'the' (true) God into his hand (cf. Isaiah 39.2-6; Daniel 5.2-4). Taking these articles as trophies of war supposedly demonstrated the superiority of the gods of Babylon over the God of Israel. Further vessels were taken in the *second* (2 Kings 24.13) and *third* invasions (2 Kings 25.6-20) until 'nothing' was left (Isaiah 39.5-6). The 'god' of Nebuchadnezzar was likely *Marduk* (Bel) after which he called his son Evil-Merodach ('man of Marduk').

The Conversion of the Exiles [vv.3-7]

v.3: Ashpenaz was the 'master' (chief) of the 'eunuchs', a word which can refer to a literal eunuch (Isaiah 56.3), but generally designates any court official (Genesis 37.36). Nebuchadnezzar's initial plan was to exile the intellectual elite of Judah's population and assume them into his own court. This removed Judah's potential leaders, without which there was no future for the nation. These individuals were members of the royal family (lit. 'seed of the kingdom') or children of Judean nobles (Isaiah 39.7). Josephus claims Daniel was a member of the family of Zedekiah. **v.4:** The children (*yeladim*, youths) were to meet stringent *physical*, *mental* and *social* requirements. They must be without physical defect (cf. Leviticus 21.17-21) and 'good in appearance' or 'form', i.e. handsome (well favoured). Intellectually they must show aptitude or ability to learn in a wide field of disciplines ('skilful in all wisdom'), be well-educated ('knowers of knowledge') and quick to understand and discern solutions to problems ('understanding science'). Such training was calculated to prepare them to 'stand' (i.e. serve) in the royal court, and thus they must have the appropriate deportment and demeanour. Such individuals that passed the initial screening tests would be taught the 'learning (literature) and tongue' of the Chaldeans (ethnic Babylonians, although refers more narrowly to a class of priest in some places, cf. 2.2; 4.7; 5.7, 11). The literature ranged from *mythology* (including legends about creation and the flood) and *astronomy* to *mathematics* and *medicine*. The language to be learned was **Akkadian** (of which Babylonian and Assyrian

were dialects). Akkadian was complicated to write, being cuneiform (using wedge-shaped characters), and commonly engraved on clay tablets. *Dream interpretation* was the longest collection of tablets, comprising 110 in all. **v.5:** In order that they might be in the best physical health for such demanding education, they were assigned a daily provision of the king's 'rich food' (meat) and 'wine'. The three years' training was to 'nourish' them (lit. 'make them great') that they might serve the king in his royal court. **v.6:** For the first time the text introduces *four* individuals among the 50-75 young men taken from the court of Judah. Each of their names contains a reference to *El* (God) or *Jehovah* (Lord), suggestive of their God-fearing parentage. **v.7:** As an expression of identification with their new homeland, each Hebrew name was changed to reflect a Babylonish god. *Daniel* (God is my judge) became *Belteshazzar* (may Bel protect his life). *Hananiah* (the Lord is gracious) became *Shadrach* (command of Aku, the moon god). *Mishael* (who is like the Lord?) became *Meshach* (Who is like Aku?). Finally, *Azariah* (the Lord is my helper) became *Abednego* (servant of Nego).

- Note the following practical lessons. The *first* attack of the enemy was focussed on the young and sought to absorb them into the education system of Babylon, to eradicate the *knowledge* of, and any *likeness* to, God by its humanistic, atheistic philosophies and values. The devil has not changed his method of attack.
- Babylon sought to change their *identity* and *allegiance* by changing their **names** (which declared their *relationship* with Jehovah), **language**, **thinking** (to reflect the values and beliefs of Babylon) and **diet**.

A Conviction of Heart [vv.8-16]

v.8: Whilst Daniel was able to accept the education (he was rooted in the word of God) and even a change of name, he would not accept that which would 'pollute' or 'stain'. The word 'defile' can refer to *ceremonial* or *moral* defilement. Daniel may have been concerned that the nature of any food was unclean according to the law of Moses (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14) or offered to idols. The wine was also undiluted (constituting strong drink). Thus Daniel 'purposed in his heart' not to pollute himself. He 'fixed' his affection (heart) on His God and made polite request for alternative arrangements. Thank God for potentially costly, yet scriptural convictions developed in Jerusalem. These men were 'transformers' not 'conformers'! *Wiersbe: According to Romans 12.1-2, 'conformers' are people whose lives are controlled by pressure from without, but 'transformers' are people whose lives are controlled by power from within.* He settled in his heart that he would not disobey or compromise the word of God. **v.9:** Again, the sovereignty of God has been at work in the life of Ashpenaz. Though he refuses Daniel's request, he is kindly disposed and deeply sympathetic towards him (Proverbs 16.7). **v.10:** If their faces did not show the same shining health as the others, he risked losing his life. Ashpenaz feared the king, whereas Daniel feared the LORD! **v.11:** Daniel was not discouraged by disappointment, but persistently sought an alternative. Are we so devoted to scriptural convictions? Some will superficially exhaust a few avenues and quickly give up! Rather than a proper name, (the) 'Melzar' is better translated 'overseer' or 'guardian', thus describing the steward with immediate responsibility for Daniel and his friends. **v.12:** Daniel suggests a 'test' (cf. Genesis 22.1) of 'pulse' to eat and 'water' to drink. 'Pulse' refers to that which is grown from sown seed and includes fruit, vegetables and grains. He was sure that faithfulness to God's word would be honoured by Him. **v.13:** After ten days (human responsibility), the 'Melzar' could compare the appearance of each of the children and judge accordingly – which test was agreed (**v.14**). **v.15:** At the end of the period, Daniel and his friends looked 'healthier' and 'better nourished' than the others who feasted on the king's dainties. The arrangement thus became permanent (**v.16**).

The Compensation of Faith [v.17]

v.17: Their faithfulness was soon rewarded by God who gave them special ability to learn, understand and apply the literature of the Chaldeans. Notably, Moses was 'learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians' (Acts 7.22) and the apostle Paul read and quoted Greek classics (cf. Acts 17.27-28; Titus 1.12). Yet their true wisdom was found, not in secular literature and learning, but the fear of the Lord (Job 28.28; Psalm 111.10). But to Daniel was given the special blessing of discerning and interpreting 'visions' (awake) and 'dreams' (asleep). Thus, throughout Nebuchadnezzar's reign he depended on Daniel as a vehicle of divine revelation (cf. Exodus 19.6; Isaiah 42.6; 49.6; Zechariah 8.21-23). Notice, Christ is our soul-food. Feeding on the right food had a threefold effect. It made them *beautiful* (Psalm 29.2), *wise* (in the things of God) and led to *advancement* (in the call of God, v.21).

Communion with the King [vv.18-20] and Continuance of Daniel [v.21]

v.18: At the completion of the three-year training programme, the students were brought before Nebuchadnezzar to 'talk'. **v.19:** It almost seems as if the discussion (or questioning) became more and more demanding until only Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah remained standing! None were found like unto these four in their wisdom and understanding (Psalm 119.98-100). **v.20:** In every 'examination' of the king he found them 'ten times' better than all the 'magicians' (from a root meaning 'to engrave', thus possibly religious scribes) who were also 'astrologers' (priests who communicated with the spirit world). **v.21:** This beautiful summary verse shows that whilst mighty Babylon would fall, God's servant remained. In fact, he continued 'unto' the first year of Cyrus (539BC) and beyond (cp. 10.1), living to be an old man of 90+ years of age. *DR Davis: Babylon, the hairy-chested macho brute of the world, has dropped with a thud into the mausoleum of history, while fragile Daniel, servant of the Most High God, is still on his feet.*