

# Daniel: *Dual Book of History & Prophecy*

## Chapter 1

### The Captivity of Judah (Verses 1-2)

- 1** The "third year of the reign of Jehoiakim" was about 605 B.C. <sup>2 Kings 24:1-2, 2 Chronicles 36:5-7</sup>, and was the time of Nebuchadnezzar's first siege and conquest of Jerusalem.
- 2** Notice "the Lord" used the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar to judge the Israelites through the overthrow of the southern Kingdom of Judah <sup>Jeremiah 25:8-9</sup>. (Earlier, the Lord punished the northern Kingdom of Israel by turning them over to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. <sup>2 Kings 17:5-8</sup>). God's judgement was the result of His people ignoring His covenant and forsaking the law for most of several hundred years. The people in the Kingdom of Judah often turned to idolatry <sup>Leviticus 25:1-7, 26:27-35, Kings 11:5, 12:28, 2 Kings 21:3-5, 2 Chronicles 28:2-3, Isaiah 24:1-6, Jeremiah 34:12-22</sup>, in spite of God's judgement warnings sent through His prophets <sup>Isaiah 1; Jeremiah 7:24-8:3, 44:20-23</sup>.

There were three Babylonian sieges and times of Israelite captivity & deportations to Babylon:

- 1.** God used Babylon as His instrument of judgement that would last 70 years <sup>Jeremiah 25:11</sup>. Accordingly, He expected for the Israelite people to accept His decisions. The first siege ended in 605 B.C. with Nebuchadnezzar not destroying Jerusalem, but leaving a vassal Jewish king in place named Jehoiakim. Many Jews were taken back to Babylon (including Daniel).
- 2.** However, Jehoiakim did not honor God's decision by doing the best for his people while accepting the Babylonian rule. When Nebuchadnezzar heard of Jehoiakim's rebellion against him (and against God), he came back for a second time. During the 5-year siege, Jehoiakim died and his son, Jehoiachin, reigned until the siege was over in 597 B.C., when an additional 10,000 Jews were exiled (Jehoiachin and Ezekiel were among these captives). At the end of the siege, Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, was installed as the new vassal king.
- 3.** Similar to his predecessors, Zedekiah "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" <sup>2 Kings 24:19</sup>. Once he rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar came back for the third time and following a siege, he and his army completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple in 586 B.C. <sup>Jeremiah 25:9</sup>.

### Jewish Youths Selected for Training (Verses 3-7)

- 3-4** Among the hostages were young men of the royal family of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar ordered the head of the court workers, Ashpenaz, to bring some of them into the palace. Having these young men in the palace would not only separate the Israelite nobility, but

## Daniel 1

they would also be a pleasant reminder to the king of his conquest of Judah. It makes sense that they would pick the best and brightest of the royal family to indoctrinate into the Babylonian culture – one of Satan’s primary approaches to thwart the plan of God.

- 5** Nebuchadnezzar and his staff assumed that three years of intense training would be enough to totally change the perspectives of these young men. One of the first ways they chose to accomplish this was by ‘rewarding’ them with food and wine from the King’s table.
- 6-7** There were probably other young men from Judah, but Daniel only names three other individuals: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Perhaps they are the only four that are mentioned because the other Jewish captives gave in to the temptation of compromise. In another attempt to change their national identity, Ashpenaz gave the four Israelites new Babylonian names: Daniel (“God is my Judge”) was given the name Belteshazzar (“May Bel protect the King”), Hananiah (“the LORD is gracious”) was named Shadrach (“Command of Aku”), Mishael (“Who is like the LORD”) was named Meshach (“Who is what Aku is?”), and Azariah (“The LORD is my helper”) was named Abednego (“Servant of Nebo (Nego”).

Interestingly, Daniel is remembered by his Hebrew name, but the others by their Babylonian names.

### Daniel’s Decision Not to Defile Himself (Verses 8-10)

- 8** Daniel and his friends were confronted with the problem of several types of compromise: the first portion of the food was offered to pagan idols, the first portion of wine was poured onto a pagan altar, the food was not prepared according to the Mosaic law and many ceremonial unclean animals were used in the preparation of the king’s food. Undoubtedly because of his deep faith and trust in God, he dared to risk insulting the king by asking Ashpenaz’s permission to abstain from these generally prized foods and wine.
- 9-10** God honored Daniel’s faithful approach by softening the official’s heart to Daniel’s request. However, Ashpenaz admitted a deathly fear of not obeying the order of Nebuchadnezzar. His fear of being beheaded was based both in the possibility someone might tell the king of his changing the order and in the king observing a change in how the four men looked.

There are many similarities in the lives of Daniel and Joseph <sup>Genesis 39-41</sup>, with a central theme of God’s use of both of these faithful men in the midst of difficult challenges/circumstances in their lives.

## Daniel 1

### Daniel's Request for a Ten-Day Test (Verses 11-16)

**11-13** Daniel could see Ashpenaz's hesitancy, because of his great concern of being punished, so he approached the guard over the four Jewish men with a very reasonable strategy. Daniel suggested a short, ten-day test that would be unlikely jeopardize the guard's position. His proposal was also wise, because it allowed the guard to remain in control of the decision. The success criterion Daniel recommended was based in his firm belief that if the four young men honored God by doing what was right, the LORD would undoubtedly make sure their bodies would be at least as healthy as the other students at the conclusion of the ten days.

**14-16** The guard decided he was safe from the king's judgement, so he agreed to the test. And God did reward their desire to obediently serve Him by making Daniel and his friends actually look better than the others who had been eating the unclean rich food and wine. Satisfied he was no longer at risk, the guard continued giving the men vegetables and water.

Some people have tried to use this story as a required call to veganism, but the reasons for this diet choice came from the issues discussed above <sup>v.8</sup> and that vegetables were not part of any pagan ritual.

### God's Blessings on Daniel and His Companions (Verses 17-21)

**17** God added to the natural intellectual ability of the four young men, as well as their careful application of their studies with even more (earthly and heavenly) wisdom <sup>Proverbs 2:6</sup>. In addition to the God-given talents all four of them received, Daniel was blessed with the gift of interpreting visions and dreams, which would be very valuable as time went on <sup>Daniel 4</sup>.

**18** Their studies complete, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego were presented to the king.

**19-20** The king immediately discerned the superior (God-given) intellect and insight of the four young Jews compared to the other students, and promoted them into the "king's service". The king also recognized that the four were not only as good as all of his many seasoned top aides, they were distinctly (ten times – more literally "ten hands") better.

**21** Daniel obediently stayed at his job until the reign of the Babylonian King Belshazzar <sup>Daniel 5</sup> (the successor to Nebuchadnezzar) was ended by the Persian King Cyrus in 539 B.C.

The following are characteristics from the confident obedience to God that led to the moral heroism of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (and are great lessons for all genuine disciples of Christ): Discernment, Resistance to evil, Confidence to voice (appropriate) disagreement, Physical courage, Perseverance, Determination, Humility, Good sense.