

Part One—Daniel's Faith—Chapter 1

CHAPTER ONE

I. DANIEL'S FAITH—1:1-21

I. PAGANIZATION ATTEMPTED

TEXT: 1:1-7

- 1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.
- 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure-house of his god.
3. And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring in certain of the children of Israel, even of the seed royal and of the nobles;
- 4 youths in whom was no blemish, but well-favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and endued with knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace; and that he should teach them the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.
- 5 And the king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's dainties, and of the wine which he drank, and that they should be nourished three years; that at the end thereof they should stand before the king.
- 6 Now among these were, of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
- 7 And the prince of the eunuchs gave names unto them: unto Daniel he gave the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

QUERIES

- a. When did this seige of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar occur?

- b. Why attempt to nourish the Hebrew lads on Babylonian "dainties?"
- c. Why were the Hebrew lads given Babylonian names?

PARAPHRASE

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and encircled the city with his army and besieged it. And the Lord permitted Nebuchadnezzar to capture Jehoiakim along with some of the sacred vessels of worship from the temple of God. Nebuchadnezzar took all his plunder along with his prisoners back to his own land of Babylon and he put the sacred vessels on display in the treasury of his own pagan temple. Then Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his servants, to select some of the young Jewish nobles and to train them in Babylonian language, sciences and culture. Ashpenaz was instructed to select young, strong, healthy, good-looking men who were well informed, widely read in many fields, alert and sensible and possessed of poise and self-confidence sufficiently to make a good appearance in the court of the king. And the king took special occasion to command that they should receive a daily serving of the richest and most desirable food and wine from his own table for a three-year training period. He planned to develop these young men physically, mentally and socially in order that they might become his advisors. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. And as a part of their naturalization into Babylonian life, the king's chief servant gave them Babylonian names. Daniel was called Belteshazzar; Hananiah was called Shadrach; Mishael was called Meshach; Azariah was called Abed-nego.

COMMENT

v. 1 IN THE THIRD YEAR . . . OF JEHOIAKIM . . . Immediately the problem of an apparent discrepancy between Daniel and Jeremiah confronts us. (1) Jeremiah 25:1 says that the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim and the *first* year of Nebuchadnezzar were the same; (2) Jeremiah 46:2 has Nebuchadnezzar defeating the army of Pharaoh-Necho at

Carchemish in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim; (3) and, finally, Jeremiah 25:8-14 seems to imply that Nebuchadnezzar had *not yet* come against Jerusalem (at all?) in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim. Yet, Daniel says not only that Nebuchadnezzar did come against Jehoiakim in Jehoiakim's *third* year, but that Nebuchadnezzar was *king* when he came in this *third* year, while Jeremiah specifically states that the *first* year of Nebuchadnezzar was not until the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim.

Historical research offers two possible solutions one of which is undoubtedly the correct answer: (1) According to the Babylonian way of designating time of regnal activity, only the *first full year* of reign was called the first year of a king's reign. The year in which the king ascended the throne, whether at the first of the year or later, was *not* designated his first year, but "the year of accession to the kingdom." Daniel, writing in Babylon, many years after the event, would undoubtedly use Babylonian terminology, especially in such a technical matter, speaks of Jehoiakim's *third* year but means the same year as does Jeremiah in mentioning the *fourth* year (Jeremiah writing in Judah, using Jewish terminology). Edward J. Young points to a biblical example of such a difference between Babylonian and Jewish methods of reckoning regnal activity. There is a passage in II Kings 24:12 through 25:30 where the *eighth* and *nineteenth* years of a reign are spoken of; the parallel passage to this in Jeremiah 52:28-30 speaks of the same reign as in the *seventh* and *eighteenth* years. The following table will help to clarify this point:

<i>Babylonian</i>	<i>Jewish</i>
Accession	First Year
First Year	Second Year
Second Year	Third Year
Third Year (Daniel 1:1)	Fourth Year (Jer. 25:1)

(2) There is a passage in Josephus (cf. Antiquities X:II:I and Contra Apion 1:19) which he copied from Berossus, the Chaldean historian, which relates that Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, had heard that a governor whom he had not set over Egypt had revolted. Being himself old,

Nabopolassar dispatched his son leading the massive Babylonian army to take the rebel in hand. This Nebuchadnezzar set out to do; but while engaged in the task, his father took sick and died. Whereupon Nebuchadnezzar turned over his captives to his subordinates, selected a small band of the most courageous of his soldiers set out immediately for the capitol city of Babylon to take over the reigns of government. Among the captives Nebuchadnezzar left with his subordinates were "Jews, Phoenicians and Syrians, and of the nations belonging to Egypt." This would imply that Nebuchadnezzar had been engaged in an expedition against Jerusalem prior to the battle at Carchemish. Notice that Daniel 1:1 does not state that Nebuchadnezzar conquered and destroyed the city of Jerusalem in the third year of Jehoiakim! only that he "came and besieged it." But, if Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem *before* he went home at the death of his father to take the reins of government, why does Daniel say *king* Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city? Daniel, writing long after the event, is using the *proleptic* form in applying the title *king*. We sometimes say, "In the childhood of President Lincoln," or "when President Teddy Roosevelt charged up San Juan hill."

The two foregoing positions are outlined here for sake of clarity. It would seem that either position is entirely credible. Which of the two is most probable, the reader must decide for himself:

(1)

1. Early 606 B.C. Jer. delivers the address recorded in Jer. 25

2. 606 B.C. Neb. besieges Jerusalem; carries off Jehoiakim, temple vessels, Daniel and friends

3. Nebuchadnezzar hastens home at death of his father

4. Early 605 B.C. Neb. defeats Egyptians at Carchemish

(2)

Early in 605 B.C. Jer. delivers the address recorded in Jer. 25

Early in 605 Neb. defeats the Egyptians at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2)

Nebuchadnezzar then appears in Palestine

Then occurs the siege of Dan. 1:1; also recorded in II Ki. 24:1; II Chron. 36:6-7

5. Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem twice more, 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. Neb. hastens to Babylon at death of his father

V. 2 AND THE LORD GAVE . . . INTO HIS HAND . . . AND HE CARRIED THEM . . . TO THE HOUSE OF HIS GOD . . . Although Nebuchadnezzar was unaware of it, and probably would not have admitted it at the time (however, he was later to change his mind), he became an instrument of the Divine will. God permitted Nebuchadnezzar to exercise his fury against Jerusalem and to take the covenant people into captivity for the good of God's people (cf. Jer. 25:1ff; Jer. 27:5-7, etc.). Please refer also to *Minor Prophets*, by Paul T. Butler, published College Press, Special Studies on Philosophy of History.

Nebuchadnezzar is spelled Nebuchadrezzar in Babylonian and means "Nebo protect the boundary," or "Nebo protect the crown." Jehoiakim was not deported, (cf. II Chron. 36:5) therefore all that Nebuchadnezzar "brought to the treasure house of his god" were some of the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. The suffix "them" can only refer grammatically to the vessels. Some of these vessels Belshazzar (Nebuchadnezzar's grandson) desecrated by using them in a drunken, riotous feast (Dan. 5:2-4). It was customary in those days for conquerors to commandeer and plunder thoroughly the treasuries of the vanquished. The rapine of defeated foes is still practiced by ungodly nations today—Russia robbed Europe of some of its most priceless treasures during World War II. The Babylonian prince took his booty home and put it in safe deposit in the treasure-house of the temple to his pagan gods.

V. 3 . . . THE KING SPAKE UNTO ASHPENAZ . . . THAT HE SHOULD BRING CERTAIN OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL . . . Lange points out that it is possible that Ashpenaz himself might not have been a literal eunuch since Joseph's master at the court of Pharaoh is called by the same Hebrew word and yet was married (cf. Gen. 37:36; 38:1-7). It is highly probable though that Ashpenaz and all his subordinates were eunuchs in the literal sense. However, it is not necessary to assume that Daniel and his Hebrew friends were made to

become literal eunuchs. In fact, Ezekiel 14:20 seems to imply that Daniel had sons and daughters. It may also be assumed that Daniel would resist being made a eunuch with as much forcefulness as he did the "king's dainties" since the law of Moses prohibited a eunuch to enter the congregation of Israel, (Deut. 23:1).

Ashpenaz, major-domo, was commanded by the king to select only the most eminent of the captives—those of royal stock. By this means he could gather, from every subjugated nation, a select body of talented young diplomats. The value of such a heterogeneous group to a pagan court, representing an amalgamation of many different political, cultural and intellectual ideas and secrets, is at once evident. Daniel was from the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe of Israel.

V. 4 . . . NO BLEMISH . . . WELL-FAVORED . . . SKILFUL IN ALL WISDOM . . . ENDUED WITH KNOWLEDGE . . . UNDERSTANDING . . . SCIENCE . . . AS HAD ABILITY TO STAND IN THE KING'S PALACE . . . TEACH THEM . . . LEARNING AND . . . TONGUE OF THE CHALDEANS . . . These are the king's own specifications. He is first of all interested that these young men who will grace his court have no physical infirmity or blemish. They must be physically handsome. Beauty was regarded almost as a virtue among the ancients. The king would not permit an ugly, misshapen, stooped, or scarred courtier. But more important, they were to be mentally alert and capable of analytical understanding. They were to be more than mere philosophers and theorists—they were to be apt at making practical applications of what was learned and known. As the Hebrew puts it—they were to have a "knowing knowledge." They were to be possessed already of a great amount of contemporary "science" and "knowledge." Nebuchadnezzar had in mind the extra-ordinary young man. He desired only the brilliant, the scholarly.

His purpose in being so selective was to gather a group of young men eager to learn and easy to teach the sciences and culture of the Babylonians. The king's theory was that if he could provide himself with a retinue of widely diversified sources of knowledge and wisdom and at the same time

Babylonianize them or bind them to loyalty to Babylon, he would be that much more able to conquer and rule.

Daniel and the other three lads were enrolled in a "crash" course in Babylonian culture and for three years were given the ancient equivalent of a liberal education. We gain some idea of the literary resources of the seventh century before Christ when we are introduced through archaeology to the vast library of Ashurbanipal (704-681 B.C. just prior to Daniel's day) which contained 22,000 volumes of cuneiform (i.e. "wedge-shaped" writing) clay tablets. These tablets contain religious, literary, and scientific works among which were the Babylonian creation and flood tablets. These tablets came from a variety of sources. Many were copied from originals by his own scribes. He dispatched officials to the cities of his Empire with orders to gather all texts of importance. One of his extant discoveries ends with the words, "If you hear of any tablet or ritualistic text that is suitable for the palace, seek it out, secure it, and send it here."

The Babylonians inherited the sexagesimal system from the ancient Sumerians. This system of numbering by sixties is still in use. We reckon sixty seconds to the minute, and sixty minutes to the hour. The system is also used in the division of the circle into three hundred and sixty degrees. Clay tablets have been found showing common familiarity with measurement of the area of rectangles and of right and isocoles triangles. An amazing knowledge of algebra is also shown in the Babylonian literature—tablets of squares, square roots, cubes, and cube roots. The Pythagorean theorem was known by the Babylonians more than a thousand years before Pythagoras!

Closely related to their knowledge of mathematics was their science of astronomy. By 800 B.C. Babylonian astronomers had attained sufficient accuracy to assign positions to the stars and note their heliacal settings. An attempt was made to determine cause and effect relationships between the motions of the heavenly bodies and purely human events and this is known as astrology and is definitely not scientific. A cuneiform tablet from about 700 B.C. classifies the fixed stars. Lengths of daylight and darkness at a given time could be predicted by the Babylonians.

In the field of medicine certain scientific advances were made. Their attempt to learn the will of the gods by an examination of animal entrails furnished, by way of analogy, some idea of human anatomy. As early as the Code of Hammurabi (1700 B.C.) physicians performed delicate operations on the human eye.

Babylonian science was the result of observation and classification and they used it to serve many practical purposes. Taxonomy in plant, animal and mineral kingdoms was practiced. Chemistry and metallurgy were everyday sciences in Daniel's day.

And, of course, there was an extremely complicated theology or philosophy of Babylonian religion. We will deal with this aspect of Daniel's education in a later section of the text.

V. 5 . . . A DAILY PORTION OF THE KING'S DAINTIES, AND OF THE WINE WHICH HE DRANK . . . The king commanded that these young men enrolled in instruction in Babylonian culture should also learn to live (especially to eat indulgently) like Babylonian men of eminence. He ordered that they learn the social graces of the Babylonian royal table by eating from the king's kitchen. "Dainties" probably refer to foods in which only the king could afford to indulge—luxurious, costly, rare, delicate—food that is associated with the lives of those who are lovers of pleasure and luxury. By association with this type of food they would be exposed to a subtle moral softening and weakening process. Godly people are warned to abstain from indulging in such eating of the flesh (cf. Psa. 141:4; Prov. 23:1-3; Rev. 18:14).

The king's purpose in this was certainly pragmatic and perhaps psychological. It is clear from the phrase, "that at the end thereof they should stand before the king," the practical end the king sought was training in social graces befitting men of the court. And, it may be, Nebuchadnezzar was attempting a psychological "brainwashing" through such a thorough introduction into Babylonian table manners. The next verses suggest this.

V. 6-7 . . . THE PRINCE OF THE EUNUCHS GAVE NAMES UNTO THEM . . . In olden days most names were theophoric. That is, they had the name of the deity incorporated. Dan-

iel means "my judge is God;" Hananiah means "gracious is Jehovah;" Mishael means "who is He that is God?" and Azariah means "Jehovah hath helped." When the Babylonians changed their names it meant they intended to honor their gods for victory over the Hebrews whose God the Babylonians believed they had vanquished. A parallel for such action is found in II Kings 23:34; 24:17; Esther 2:7.

Beltheshazzar means "protect his life;" Shadrach means "command of Aku (the moon god);" Mesach means "who is what Aku (the moon god) is?" and Abednego means "servant of Nebo." No doubt the purpose of the Babylonian king was to so assimilate these young men into the Babylonian culture they would become, for all practical purposes, Babylonians and dissociate themselves completely from the Hebrew ways; even from their God. Although these lads did accommodate themselves readily to new knowledge and new culture, they remained true to their knowledge of and daily walk with the Living God. The rest of their story is yet to be learned.

QUIZ

1. What evidence is there that Daniel (606-536 B.C.) wrote this book and not some pseudo-Daniel of 200-1000 B.C.?
2. What is the purpose of the book of Daniel?
3. What is apocalyptic literature?
4. Describe the city of Babylon in Daniel's day—give its location, etc.
5. Show how the apparent discrepancy between Jeremiah's account of Jehoiakim and Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's account do not contradict.
6. How extensive was the knowledge and wisdom of the Babylonians at this time?
7. Why did the king insist on these young men eating food from his table?

II. PERSEVERANCE ACTUATED

TEXT: 1:8-16

- 8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine