

STUDY NOTES for DANIEL ONE

THE KING'S FOOD

Daniel 1:1-21

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The book of Daniel spans the time period of Israel's Babylonian Captivity (605-536 B.C.). Being written by Daniel during that era, the book was probably issued as a public document by 530 B.C. Though the critics have attempted to refute this early date of Daniel, the internal evidences of the book, along with a multitude of archeological finds, including the Qumran fragments, all support the historicity of Daniel and his eyewitness accounts. The words of Christ also confirm Daniel's authenticity (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). It must be remembered that Bible critics must either argue away the historicity of such books as that of Daniel's, or be forced to believe in God's ability to foretell specific events hundreds of years before they occur! We might excuse them, however, for they know nothing of the unlimited ability of the God of the Bible (1 Cor. 2:14).

Daniel's writings are a combination of inspiring historical narratives and striking divine revelations. The prophecies of Daniel are invaluable to man's knowledge of God's program for the ages. Though various outlines could be formulated, these lessons will consider the book of Daniel in two divisions: (1) the life of Daniel in Babylon (chapters 1-6), and (2) the visions of Daniel in Babylon (chapters 7-12). Daniel's life in Babylon centered around four rulers: Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1-4), Belshazzar (Dan. 5), and Cyrus and Darius (Dan. 6). Innumerable treasures will be found along the way if the student of this book watches carefully the life of the inspired writer as he lives for God in a hostile environment. Daniel was a good witness for God in Babylon:

- (1) He was faithful to God and lived a holy life in an idolatrous society.
- (2) He witnessed to kings and officials by his words and life of God's sovereignty.
- (3) He put God's authority ahead of the king's, but did it with grace and humility.
- (4) He prayed to God three times a day, even when his life was threatened with death for doing it.

Chapter one opens the section of Daniel's life under Nebuchadnezzar by relating Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem.

DANIEL'S STAND FOR GOD IN BABYLON [1:1-21]

I. The Defeat of Jerusalem – 1:1-2

A. The Historical Setting for the Defeat of Jerusalem – 1:1

1:1 – In the spring of 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar defeated the vestiges of the crumbling Assyrian Empire at Carchemish in northern Syria, and then pressed on south into Palestine in order to subdue several nations including the Jewish nation as well as the Egyptian. In the summer of that same year, Jerusalem was besieged and quickly fell to the aspiring Babylonians.

After Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in the summer of 605 B.C., his father, King Nabopolassar, died on Aug. 14. To secure the throne for himself, Nebuchadnezzar dashed across the desert in two weeks or less and was made king on Sept. 6. The captives and booty were sent on the route over the “Fertile Crescent.”

The dating discrepancy between Jer. 46:2 and this verse regarding the time of Jehoiakim’s reign in 605 B.C. is resolved by the difference in year reckoning. Daniel’s year in Babylon began in the fall, while Jeremiah’s year in Judah began in the spring. Daniel’s reckoning was 6 months later than Jeremiah’s.

B. The Subjugation of Jewish Government and Worship – 1:2

1:2 – The king of Israel, Jehoiakim, became a mere vassal of Nebuchadnezzar, and a portion of the temple vessels used in Israel’s Levitical ritual were confiscated and taken as booty and put in the temple of Nebuchadnezzar’s heathen gods.

More vessels were taken to Babylon when the city was destroyed in 586 B.C. These vessels were kept in Babylon until Cyrus gave the Jews permission to take the vessels with them when they returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:7-11).

Israel’s captivity should have been no surprise to them. The nation had been warned many times. Moses had warned the people early in their national life that captivity would follow their unfaithfulness (cf. Dt. 28:47ff). Isaiah had also warned the Jews of the coming captivity, especially linking it with Hezekiah’s imprudence (2 Kgs. 20:12-19; cf. Isa. 39:6). Jeremiah cried out continually about this captivity, naming Nebuchadnezzar as the conqueror and even giving the number of years that they would remain in captivity – seventy years (Jer. 25:1-11). Thus it was no accident that they went into captivity, but rather “the Lord gave Jehoiakim . . . with a part of the vessels of the house of God” into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This was God’s sovereign act of chastening His people, not Nebuchadnezzar’s power to conquer Judah. National godlessness was manifest in three areas:

- 1) Godless leaders – “Jehoiakim.” They may profess a knowledge of God, but they were godless in their living (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:36-37; 2 Chron. 36:5-8).
- 2) Adulterous citizens – “Judah.” They were adulterous physically or spiritually, or both (cf. Jer. 3:1-11).
- 3) Apostate worshippers – “the house of God.” Their outward form may be unchanged, but it was without the life of God (cf. Jer. 7).

II. The Deportation of the Elite – 1:3-7

A. The Selection of the Captives – 1:3-4

1:3 – Only the elite of Jewish society were deported to Babylon at this time. Many were of regal lineage (cf. Josephus “Antiquities” X, 10, 1). They were “of the king’s seed, and of the princes.” “Master of his eunuchs” simply means chief officer. It does not mean Daniel was made a eunuch.

1:4 – All were to be without defect (“no blemish”), good looking (“well-favored”) and intelligent (“wisdom...knowledge...science”) with the promise of being able to serve (“stand”) in the king’s court. They were to be taught the literature (“learning”) and language (“tongue”) of the Babylonians. This proves that believers, even in the midst of an apostate society, can be:

- 1) Highbred (3b) without being high minded or proud
- 2) Attractive (4a) without being worldly or sensual
- 3) Intelligent (4b) without being agnostic or atheistic
- 4) Prominent (4c) without being aspiring or self-serving
- 5) Teachable (4d) without being double-minded or men-pleasers

The deportation of these elite Jews probably served a two-fold purpose for Nebuchadnezzar. (1) It deprived the Jews, who were left in Palestine, of strong leadership material. (2) It provided an opportunity for the Babylonians to indoctrinate these potential Jewish leaders with Babylonian culture, worship and governmental procedures so as to secure their future loyalty and through them to secure the loyalty of the whole Jewish nation, which was their ultimate goal.

B. The Assignment of the Captives – 1:5

1:5 – These captives were assigned, along with their cultural/political studies, a menu from the king's own table. This was not only an appeal to their support and loyalty and the means for keeping them in good health (v. 10), but it would also be a means of causing these young captives to compromise, especially the Jewish captives, in the area of their religion. In eating of the king's table, they would be honoring the king's gods. Furthermore, the Jewish captives would be forsaking at least one of the four dietary laws of God:

- 1) The regulations of the cleanness of meats (Lev. 11; Dt. 14:3-20)
- 2) The regulations of slaughter (Lev. 17:10-16)
- 3) The regulations of preparation (Ex. 23:19; 34:26)
- 4) The regulation of singular worship (Ex. 20:3 – partaking of food dedicated to heathen gods was considered a violation of this principle)

The privilege of eating from the king's table was no honor for Daniel and his friends, but rather a serious problem.

C. The Identification of Certain Captives – 1:6-7

1:6 – The Jewish concept of naming children in connection with God's name was also common among the heathen with regard to their gods.

1:7 – Part of the “reprogramming” of these captives, then, involved the changing of their names to correspond with the Babylonian deities. Though the translation of these names is somewhat debatable, the following suggestions at least show the thrust of these name changes:

- Daniel (God is my Judge) – Belteshazzar (Bel protect his life)
- Hananiah (Jehovah is gracious) – Shadrach (Command of Aku)
- Mishael (Who is what God is?) – Meshach (Who is what Aku is?)
- Azariah (Jehovah helps) – Abednego (Servant of Nebo)

(Bel, Aku, and Nebo were Babylonian gods.)

Obviously, Nebuchadnezzar's ultimate goal was to totally transform the minds of these young captives (v. 4), their worship (v. 5) and even their Jewish identity (v. 7). They were to be thoroughly indoctrinated with Babylonian culture in three years' time.

III. The Determination of Daniel – 1:8-16

A. The Substance of His Resolve – 1:8a

1:8a – Daniel was one of very few true God-fearing Jews left among the apostate nation. He determined that he must remain true to his God and the Law rather than to compromise. Thus he “purposed” or “set” in his heart to do right. He could attend the Babylonian literature and language classes, but they could not force his mind to change about Judaism and the true God. He could answer to a Babylonian name without endangering his faith, but to eat of the king's food would directly cause him to disobey God's law, and Daniel purposed not to defile himself.

Daniel's resolution was no simple decision, however. Many factors made it difficult to take a stand. It would have been easier to concede and eat the king's food than to stand for God. These are some possible excuses Daniel could have used for compromise:

- 1) All of his Jewish peers, except those three mentioned with him, apparently accepted the conditions of the Babylonian king without objection.
- 2) No less than the king of the strongest world empire had commanded this program and who was going to disobey? (cf. Acts 5:29)
- 3) The Babylonians were famous for their harsh punishment of the disobedient (cf. 2:5; 3:6; 3:29; Jer. 29:21-22).
- 4) Any who did not fully cooperate with the king's program were not likely to rise to any degree of prominence in the king's court.
- 5) The encouraging strength of adult leadership was absent.
- 6) God could, in a wrong sense, be "blamed" for forcing the Hebrew children into these difficult circumstances.
- 7) The food offered would be appealing and would only be eaten for three short years after which the Jewish law could once again be obeyed.
- 8) The officials of Babylon would certainly think him foolish for refusing such a handsome opportunity for so "small" a reason. Daniel gave in to none of these excuses for he knew that there is no excuse for sin.

B. The Request of His Resolve – 1:8b-10

1:8b – Daniel asked the highest official over all of the captives that he be excluded from the king's food.

1:9-10 – Though God had blessed Daniel's testimony and had given him special favor with this official, the man did not want to commit himself to be responsible for Daniel's noncompliance. He did not forbid Daniel's request, but he did protect himself from legal responsibility by not giving his explicit permission. He obviously did not possess any faith in God's ability to keep Daniel healthy, but his main concern was, of course, for himself. (Literally, he said, "You shall make my head guilty in respect to the king.")

A godly believer with convictions will temper them with grace and humility. Notice that:

- 1) Daniel was not afraid to speak with this high official concerning his deep personal convictions (v. 8).
- 2) He was not obnoxious or adamant, but politely requested exclusion from the required menu (v. 8).
- 3) His life had obviously been consistent and honorable in the eyes of this official and God blessed his godliness with a "favorable" and "compassionate" relationship between him and his superior.
- 4) He did not press this man to commit himself to a decision that he was unwilling to make. Neither did he resign himself to compliance simply because one avenue of exclusion was closed to him.
- 5) He was loyal to truth with faithfulness as a slave to God and yet submissive to his earthly masters.

C. The Accomplishment of His Resolve – 1:11-16

1. The Test – 1:11-14

1:11 – Daniel was certainly not thwarted in his resolution. Since the highest official had not forbidden him to pursue his convictions, Daniel appealed to a lesser official, the one directly over him and his three friends. "Melzar" means overseer.

1:12-13 – Daniel requested of this official a short, ten-day test. Daniel not only made a request, but he had a plan. Daniel and his friends would go on a vegetarian diet and only drink water. Then after ten days this official could determine the propriety of continuing such a diet.

1:14 – The official agreed to those conditions. Notice the strength of Daniel’s resolve in setting up this test:

- 1 Daniel believed that God could not only sustain, but also exemplify their health over that of the other Hebrews in only ten short days.
- 2 Daniel and his friends were willing to eat only seed foods and drink water for three entire years while those around them fared royally. He would far rather eat “pulse” in the will of God than meat and wine out of it (cf. Prov. 22:17-18).

2. The Result – 1:15-16

1:15 – God faithfully blessed Daniel’s resolution so much so that even in that short amount of time, these godly young Jews fared far better than their unprincipled peers.

1:16 – For that reason, this lesser official continued day by day to give them vegetables and water instead of the king’s meat and wine, though he must have continued to monitor their appearance. But what God did for them in ten days He continued to do for three years, and these young Jews were never forced to compromise their convictions.

IV. The Distinction of the Godly Men – 1:17-21

A. God’s Evaluation – 1:17

1:17 – Of course, God was well-pleased with the dedication of these young men, and He sovereignly and graciously rewarded their faithfulness to Him by giving them special abilities to grasp their extensive studies. Daniel, the leader of the other three, was given the special gift of understanding revelatory visions and dreams.

B. Nebuchadnezzar’s Evaluation – 1:18-21

1:18 – When testing time came, all the students were brought before the king.

1:19-20 – None of the students compared with Daniel and his three Hebrew friends. They highly impressed the king and were made a part of his court (“stood before the king”). They exceeded by ten times any of the other learned men in Nebuchadnezzar’s realm. Even though Daniel wrote these words about himself, it was a testimony of God’s grace (1:17; 2:20, 30).

1:21 – Daniel remained in Babylon until Babylon was replaced by the Medo-Persians in 539 B.C. He may have served in the Babylonian government without a break, but this verse does not say so. It also does not say that Daniel died when Cyrus became ruler. We know from 10:1 that Daniel was still alive in the third year of Cyrus and probably lived much longer. It simply means Daniel lived in Babylon all through the captivity until Babylon fell. During that time he had seen six Babylonian kings in power and court plots caused the assassination of two of those kings.

Principles to Learn and Apply

1. Know God’s Will: He wants His children to be separated from the sins of the world.

Principle applied: He wants us to be holy, as He is holy.

2. Trust God’s Power: He is able to overcome hindrances in living a separated life.

Principle applied: He is able to keep us from being tempted above our ability to handle it.

3. Believe God’s Love: He will bless His children that live a separated life.

Principle applied: He will bless us when we live a holy life.