

Daniel 1:1-21

Introducing the Prophet Daniel

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish exile brings our story into Babylon and introduces us to the prophet Daniel.

Daniel is a weird book - a combination of history, prophecy and apocalyptic images. Reflecting the multicultural milieu Daniel lived in, the book uses Hebrew, Aramaic and Persian phrases. In the Jewish Bible, it is listed among the writings rather than the prophets.

Controversy

Daniel has long been controversial, with many modern critics insisting it was written anonymously, and much later than its setting. Some propose that it was written in the second century B.C. to encourage the Maccabean Jews in their struggle against Antiochus.

But Jesus expressly says that Daniel wrote the book:

- **Matthew 24:15-16** - "'So when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place..." - quoting **Daniel 11:31**.

And John in Revelation adopts much of Daniel's imagery in his own apocalyptic narrative.

Scholars have answered doubts about the date and authorship to my satisfaction. But if you want to dive into these questions more deeply, here are some links to start:

- <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/107/arguments-for-early-late-date-of-authorship-of-daniel>
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- <http://www.jeramy.org/papers/daniel.html>
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- http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_daniel.html
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- <https://jimhamilton.info/2010/11/26/josephus-on-alexander-the-great-and-the-book-of-daniel/>

Daniel Taken into Exile

Daniel 1:1-2 - "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the

vessels into the treasure house of his god."

Daniel was one of a group of Judean "princes" - of royal lineage - who were specifically taken to train up to be servants in the court of the king of Babylon. He was among the first group of prisoners taken around 597 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar during the reign of Jehoiakim - about 10 years before the Babylonians returned and totally destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The prophet Ezekiel was also taken in this deportation. (See **2 Kings 24:10-17**)

Daniel 1:3-4 - "And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

This was prophesied in **Isaiah 39:7** - "And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

It's possible they were made into actual eunuchs by castration, but the term saris can also simply mean "servant."

These young men were more like hostages, to be indoctrinated in the ways of Babylon, and used as leverage to keep those remaining back in Judah from revolting. This tactic was widely used later by the Romans.

Daniel 1:5 - "And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king."

New Names

Daniel 1:6-7 - "Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego."

Daniel (meaning God is my judge) was changed to Belteshazzar (meaning Bel's prince). Rashi says Teshazzar is the Aramaic expression denoting wisdom.

Hannaniah (meaning Beloved by the LORD) was changed to Shadrach (meaning Illumined by the Sun-god).

Mishael (meaning Who is as God) was changed to Meshach (which may mean Who is like Shach, which some believe was a Babylonian goddess corresponding to Ishtar or Venus).

Azariah (meaning The LORD is my help) was changed to Abed-Nego (meaning Servant of Nego).

Recall that some disciples of Jesus also received new names - Simon became Peter, the rock. Saul became Paul. This was to emphasize that they were "new creations" and had a new identity.

Spiritually, this is what the world tries to do to us.

It wants us to forget our true identity in Christ and revert to our old "name" in Adam, to become indoctrinated, embracing the way of the world, and to eat and get sustenance from what the world offers us rather than from God.

Daniel 1:8 - "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."

Daniel knew who he was, so he didn't need to protest his new name. And learning about Babylonian language and customs, he knew, wouldn't dislodge him from his faith in God. But the food was not kosher, and possibly had been offered to idols. God had forbidden it.

He explained his religious objection, and requested another option.

Daniel 1:9 - "Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs."

This was not a romantic relationship. "Tender love" = *raḥam* - usually translated "tender mercies" and used of God's relation to his people, or the tender feelings a mother has for her child.

God was already opening doors for Daniel.

Daniel 1:10 - "And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king."

So Daniel proposed a short test:

Daniel 1:11-14 - "Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days."

"pulse" = *zeraon* - seeds. From *zara* - something sown. Or more likely "what grows from seeds," meaning vegetables. The rabbis translated this as beans.

But there is a hint of a hidden spiritual secret in this phrase.

- **Galatians 3:16** - "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

He refers too **Genesis 12:7** - "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him."

The verse in Daniel refers to *zeraon* - "seeds" plural. But it points to the same truth.

Suggesting a diet of "seeds" was an outward reflection that Daniel "purposed in his heart" to consume and get sustenance only from the one Seed/Christ, "And to thy Seed, which is one" (**Galatians 3:16**).

A similar word, but not from the same root, is *zeroah*, the "arm" of the Lord. The piece of lamb on the seder plate depicting the Passover lamb is called *zeroah*, because the arm of the Lord brought redemption.

The lamb is "sown" like a seed through his sacrifice, by the arm of the Lord.

- **John 12:24-25** - "Verily, verily, I say unto you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it abideth alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life...."

We're in a similar situation as Daniel and the others.

Jesus prayed this for his disciples:

- **John 17:14-15** - "I have given them Your word and the world has hated them; for they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I am not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one."

Like Daniel and his friends, God can help us exist in this world while remaining faithful to the truth. But it requires sacrifice and humility.

Basically, we agree with Paul's confession:

- **Galatians 2:20** - "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

We're in the world, but not of it, because through the cross, "the world is crucified to me,

and I to the world." (**Galatians 6:14**)

Daniel 1:15-16 - "And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

The 10-day test worked, and their diet was substituted permanently.

It was actually a fulfillment of a promise:

- **Exodus 23:25** - "So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water."

Daniel 1:17 - "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams."

Their God-given skill and mastery was preceded by inner conviction, purity of heart and faith.

Daniel 1:8-21 - "Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus."