

Set Up

Daniel 1:1-9

I. Set the Scene 1-7

a. God Allowed

- i. “Delivered” is literally the Hebrew word *nātan*, “gave.” It was not Nebuchadnezzar’s military might or brilliance that brought about the downfall of Jerusalem, but it was the sovereign will of God. “Kings like to think themselves sufficient as ruler, but they are as much under the supreme control of God as any person
- ii. God in his sovereignty had permitted Nebuchadnezzar to come against Judah in order to judge Jehoiakim and the sinful nation (cf. 2 Chr 36:5; Hab 1–2). For hundreds of years the Lord had warned his wayward people to repent or face judgment, but they had not listened to his servants the prophets (cf. 9:6). Moses had even predicted Israel’s captivity as a consequence of forsaking the Lord (cf. Deut 28:36–37, 49–68). God had been patient, but Israel’s sin had now reached its limits, and judgment fell.
- iii. That Daniel’s God was not asleep but in full command of the situation is indicated by the name for deity selected by the author. In v. 2 the word translated “Lord” is not Yahweh (represented in the NIV by “LORD”) but *’ādōnay*, and this fact is significant. “Owner, ruler, or sovereign” is the meaning of *’ādōnay*, the equivalent of *kyrios* in the New Testament and in the LXX

b. Babylon Jerusalem Besieged

- i. King of Judah delivered Jehoiakim
- ii. Vessels of the House of God
 1. The victorious king carried these treasures to Babylon (located in Modern Iraq) and placed them in “the temple of his god.” Nebuchadnezzar’s name contains the designation of the god Nabu/Nebo, but “his god” probably refers to Marduk (Bel), the chief god of Babylon who of course was worshiped by the king
 - 2.
- iii. Royal family and nobles
 1. Nebuchadnezzar took Israelite (a general designation for the chosen people here) captives only “from the royal family” (lit., “from the seed of the kingship”) and from “the nobility.” Daniel and his friends fit into at least one of the two named categories, most likely both.
 2. All four young men were from the tribe of Judah and, if Slotki is correct, from the line of the kings. Even if there are two classes,

the likelihood is that Daniel was of royal birth. Josephus declared that Daniel and his three friends were members of Zedekiah's family

3. "A few choice hostages from the Judean court would weaken resources there, prove useful to the conqueror and reinforce Judah's vassal status." This passage demonstrates at least a partial fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that descendants of Hezekiah would be taken as officials to Babylon (cf. Isa 39:7).

II. Set Up

a. Youth

i. Young

1.

ii. No defect

1. Daniel and his friends also were required to be in good physical health ("without any physical defect") so that their performance in the king's service might not be inhibited. That the defect in question was of a physical nature is made clear from an examination of Lev 21:17–21. In Lev 21:17–18, 21 the equivalent Hebrew term *mûm*
2. the education of Persian youths began in their 14th year," and it is reasonable to assume that the Babylonians commenced the training of young people at about the same age as the Persians. Daniel then would likely have been about fourteen or fifteen years of age when he was taken into captivity and began his training. Nebuchadnezzar wanted boys at a "teachable age" so they would be able and willing to learn new things.

iii. Good looking

iv. Showing intelligence

1. Intelligence was of the utmost importance to Nebuchadnezzar. "Showing aptitude" is a translation of the Hebrew word *maškilîm* (root=*śākal*, "to be prudent"), which means in this verbal form "having insight" or "comprehension." Here it speaks of the ability to learn or comprehend information. "For every kind of learning" is literally "in all wisdom (*bēkol-hokmâ*)" and would include secular as well as religious instruction
2. In every branch of wisdom

v. Ability to serving in the king's court

1. "Power" (*kōaḥ*) here denotes "ability" and refers to "a proper manner, poise, confidence, and knowledge of social proprieties" expected at the royal court. Daniel and his friends were to be trained as counselors to Nebuchadnezzar

b. Indoctrinated

i. Culture Taught literature and language of Chaldeans

1. Educated three years

- a. After the successful completion of the three-year training period, the young men were to enter royal service. Evidently the level of governmental responsibility was determined by the king's examination of the trainees at the end of the program
- b. An opportunity to achieve a privileged position in the king's court was also afforded to the young men. "They were to be trained" ("nourishing them," KJV) is literally "to make them great [*gādal*]." The Hebrew word is used of raising children (cf. Isa 1:2).
- c. The Hebrews studied the extensive body of literature preserved in their new home. Babylon was the learning center of the day and had acquired the remarkable library left by the Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal
- d. A privileged education was provided for the young men. They learned to speak and write the language of Babylon, which was a form of Akkadian known as Neo-Babylonian. Akkadian was written in cuneiform, which was made up of wedge-shaped characters, commonly engraved on clay tablets. Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of these texts. Daniel and his friends would have known several other languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, and, later, Persian.

ii. Food

1. Daily Ration

2. King's choice food

- a. **1:5** Daniel and his friends received a privileged diet as well. Their food came "from the king's table" ("royal rations," NRSV) that is, they ate the very food the king ate. *Pat-bag* ("food," or perhaps better "rich food") is a Persian loan word that occurs in the Bible only in Daniel (1:5, 8, 13, 15–16; 11:26).

III. Set His Mind 1:8-12

- a. Made - set upon his heart – to take to heart, to regard pay attention to, resolves, applies
 - i. Mind- will or intention
 1. Daniel's desire was to please God in all he did. So he **resolved** that even though he was not in his own land but in a culture that did not follow God's laws, he would consider himself under the Law

- ii. Defile – to be stained , to make ethically or ritually unclean, the pollution specified is from any breach of moral or ceremonial law
 - 1. *Gā'al* (“defile”) occurs eleven times in the Old Testament (e.g., Mal 1:7, 12; Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64; Isa 59:3) and refers to moral or ceremonial defilement. In this case Daniel would have been defiled on both counts.

b. Diet

i. Prohibited

- 1. Throughout their history, remaining true to the Mosaic law in matters concerning diet was a challenge for the Jews when in foreign lands (cf. Tob 1:10–12; 1 Macc 1:62–63), and now the four Hebrew youths were confronted with this dilemma
- 2. Second, the meat and wine would have been undesirable because a portion of it was (at least on occasions if not always) first offered sacrificially to the Babylonian gods before being sent to the king and was therefore associated with idolatrous worship. Although wine was not forbidden by the Jewish law, Daniel’s aversion to drinking it probably is to be explained by its use as a libation in these pagan rituals.
- 3. First, many of the foods eaten at the Babylonian court (e.g., pork and horseflesh) would have been unclean according to the law of Moses (cf. Lev 11 and Deut 14), either inherently or because they were not prepared properly; for example, the blood might not have been drained from the meat (cf. Lev 17:13–14). To eat such foods would have been a sin for an Israelite and would have rendered the individual ceremonially unclean before God.
- 4. First-century Christians faced a similar dilemma (cf. 1 Cor 10:25–28). Thus Daniel’s refusal to eat the king’s food was based upon his deep religious convictions. He desired to remain true to his God
- 5. Similar problems would arise in drinking the wine. To abstain from the Old Testament prohibition against “strong drink” (e.g., Prov. 20:1, KJV Isa. 5:11, “drinks”), Jews customarily diluted wine with water. Some added 3 parts of water to wine, others 6 parts, and some as much as 10 parts of water to 1 part of wine. The Babylonians did not dilute their wine. So both the food and the drink would have defiled these Jewish young men. **Daniel** knew the requirements of the Law governing what he should and should not eat and drink.
- 6. The fact that it was prepared by Gentiles rendered it unclean. Also no doubt many things forbidden by the Law were served on the king’s table, so to partake of such food would defile the Jewish youths. Further, without doubt this royal food had been sacrificed and offered to pagan gods before it was offered to the king. To partake of such food would be contrary to Exodus 34:15, where the Jews were forbidden to eat flesh sacrificed to pagan gods.

7. Acts 15:29, and against wine as generally graced with a religious libation (*cf.* 1 Cor. 10:21),
- ii. Refused
 1. To refuse the royal diet could have been taken as an insult to the king and as an act of direct disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar's orders. (2) Pressure from Daniel's peers most certainly made the decision difficult. Everyone else was doing it. By choosing this course of action, Daniel and his friends were setting themselves apart from the others. Now they were different, strange. (3) Such unorthodox behavior could have jeopardized their chances for advancement. (4) The quality of food would have been attractive. It was the best in the land. (5) Their new location may have tempted them to be unfaithful.
- iii. Eat
 1. Since the Mosaic Law designated no vegetables as unclean, Daniel could eat any vegetables put before him without defiling himself. In so short a time (**10 days**) there could have been no marked deterioration that would jeopardize the life of anyone in authority. In fact Daniel hinted that their **appearance** would be better than that of the others who were on the king's diet.
- c. Favor
 - i. God Granted
 1. **Daniel** had trusted his situation to God who intervened on Daniel's behalf to move the official's heart **to show favor** (*hesed*, "loyal love") **and sympathy** (*rahāmîm*, "compassion") **to Daniel**
 - ii. Favor- This is one reason God blessed Daniel with such great insight. He acted upon the spiritual light he had, and God honored his faithfulness by imparting more.
 - iii. Compassion
 1. In sight of the commander and officials

IV. Kept It Set Daniel 6

- a. Lion's den and prayer
- b. Daniel distinguished himself v.3
 - i. Distinguished- distinguish oneself : to demonstrate activity, demonstrate strength
 - ii. among the other officials because of his "exceptional qualities," literally, "An exceptional spirit was in him." This "exceptional spirit" may refer to his good attitude or abilities, but possibly the king recognized that Daniel was in touch with the gods and thus possessed great wisdom.
 - iii. Reputation can't stop persecutipon
- c. Planned Persecution

-
- Integrity*
- Religion*
- Refuse to worship*
- Polytheist*
- i. Trying to Find a Ground
 - ii. Let us be found Guilty of Religion
 - iii. They began to examine Daniel's governmental activities in order to discover some flaw in his character or professional ability in order to bring a charge against him to the king, but none was found. Daniel handled his duties in a faithful manner ("trustworthy")—he was neither politically "corrupt" (dishonest) nor "negligent" in the performance of his work.
 - iv. Finally, these jealous officials decided that there was only one area in which they might find a conflict between Daniel and the Persian government, namely, in the area of his religion. They hoped that there might be something in Daniel's religious beliefs ("the law of his God") that might disqualify him from serving in Darius's court. Daniel was a strict monotheist, and therefore they planned to ensnare him by forcing him to refuse to worship other gods. Thus Daniel's choice would be to obey "the law of his God" or the law of man ("the laws of the Medes and Persians"; cf. v. 8
 - v. Went as a group" translates an Aramaic verb (from *rēgaš*) that primarily signifies "to be in tumult," and the verb form (*haphel*) used means "to show tumultuousness" or "to come thronging." Thus the term can denote a mob scene rather than an orderly group casually appearing before the king.

d. Good Trouble - 6:10-11 - 1 Thessalonians 5:17 Luke 21:36 Luke 18:1

e. His enemies tried to trap him 6:4-5

i. Daniel had distinguished himself to King Darius 6:3

→ ii. For Doing the right thing. We don't deserve it?

f. He Continued Praying

→ i. Many of us pray for no trouble but he continued to pray knowing trouble would come

ii. Even though he knew

iii. On the roof, windows open

g. Kneeling

i. Three Times

1. The practice of praying toward Jerusalem evidently was based on the injunctions of Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:35, 38, 44, 48 delivered at the dedication of the temple (ca. 960 B.C.). Jerusalem was the place where Solomon's temple had stood, and this edifice had symbolized the presence of Yahweh God.

→ 2. Undoubtedly, Daniel's practice of praying three times a day was not peculiar to himself but reflected a custom, at least in the eastern diaspora. By the first century C.E. this custom was widespread enough to influence emerging Christianity

3. Daniel prayed three times a day, supposedly at morning, midday, and night (cf. Ps 55:17). The old statesman was a man of prayer and is an example of the importance of that discipline for modern believers.

ii. Praying

Home

Give

Thanks

iii. Giving Thanks Daniel's prayer was first a prayer of thanksgiving (Dan. 6:10) as he acknowledged God's goodness to him

iv. As He had done previously

h. Found him

i. Making petition- Making Request

1. His prayer was also a prayer for guidance and **help** (v. 11).

Doubtless the responsibility of high office rested heavily on **Daniel** and he sought God's wisdom in the decisions he had to make.

ii. Supplication – **to implore**

Request

Word Studies

Made - set upon his heart – to take to heart, to regard pay attentions to, resolves, applies ¹

Heart- will or intention-

Defile – to be stained To make ethically or ritually unclean²the pollution specified is from any breach of moral or ceremonial law³

Commentary Study

(1) Daniel's Decision (1:8)

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

1:8 Throughout their history, remaining true to the Mosaic law in matters concerning diet was a challenge for the Jews when in foreign lands (cf. Tob 1:10–12; 1 Macc 1:62–63),⁶⁰ and now the four Hebrew youths were confronted with this dilemma. Yet “Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.” His friends concurred in this decision as is evident from the following verses (cf. 1:11–16). *Gā'al* (“defile”) occurs eleven times in the Old Testament (e.g., Mal 1:7, 12; Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64; Isa 59:3) and refers to moral or ceremonial defilement. In this case Daniel would have been defiled on both counts.

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1323.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [“Defile,”](#) in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 608.

³ R. Laird Harris, [“301 לָאָל.”](#) in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 145.

⁶⁰ It is true that the Mosaic dietary laws were an issue in the persecutions of Antiochus, but as Lacocque acknowledges, “Beginning in the sixth century, the dietary question became of prime importance for Israel in contact with the nations” (*Daniel*, 28).

At least two factors would have caused these religious Jews to be reluctant to eat the king's food. First, many of the foods eaten at the Babylonian court (e.g., pork and horseflesh)⁶¹ would have been unclean according to the law of Moses (cf. Lev 11 and Deut 14), either inherently or because they were not prepared properly; for example, the blood might not have been drained from the meat (cf. Lev 17:13–14). To eat such foods would have been a sin for an Israelite and would have rendered the individual ceremonially unclean before God.

Second, the meat and wine would have been undesirable because a portion of it was (at least on occasions if not always) first offered sacrificially to the Babylonian gods before being sent to the king and was therefore associated with idolatrous worship.⁶² Although wine was not forbidden by the Jewish law, Daniel's aversion to drinking it probably is to be explained by its use as a libation in these pagan rituals. Wood points out that partaking of this food would have been an indirect act of worshiping the Babylonian deities.⁶³

First-century Christians faced a similar dilemma (cf. 1 Cor 10:25–28).⁶⁴ Thus Daniel's refusal to eat the king's food was based upon his deep religious convictions. He desired to remain true to his God.

Here obedience to Scripture's divine commands may be observed. This is one reason God blessed Daniel with such great insight. He acted upon the spiritual light he had, and God honored his faithfulness by imparting more.

In order to avoid defilement, the young Jewish captive asked the chief official (Ashpenaz) if he might be served a substitute diet. In making his request, Daniel was polite and tactful. Believers today may disagree with official policies and even with each other, but they should follow Daniel's example in disagreeing in an agreeable fashion.

At first glance this request seems simple enough, but a number of factors rendered this a courageous act. (1) To refuse the royal diet could have been taken as an insult to the king and as an act of direct disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar's orders. (2) Pressure from Daniel's peers most certainly made the decision difficult. Everyone else was doing it. By choosing this course of action, Daniel and his friends were setting themselves apart from the others. Now they were different, strange. (3) Such unorthodox behavior could have jeopardized their chances for advancement. (4) The quality of food would have been attractive. It was the best in the land. (5) Their new location may have tempted them to be unfaithful.

⁶¹ Cf. Baldwin, *Daniel*, 83; Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 45.

⁶² Cf. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 188–90.

⁶³ Wood, *Daniel*, 37.

⁶⁴ Baldwin (*Daniel*, 83) and Towner (*Daniel*, 25–26) suggest that Daniel did not desire to eat the food because this would have obligated him to the king and his policies. However, Daniel's eating the king's food does not seem to have covenant significance in this context, and Wiseman correctly observes that even a plainer diet would have marked the Hebrews' indebtedness to the king if this were the case (*Nebuchadnezzar*, 85).

Judah was nine hundred miles away; parents and friends would never know whether or not they kept God's laws. Yet Daniel and his friends were aware of a very important fact. Other people might not know their actions, but God would know, and someday all will give an account of themselves to him. (6) It would have been natural to argue that since God had not protected them from captivity—this horrible situation—they did not have to be careful to obey his commands. They could have become bitter toward God during this time. Sometimes believers fall into this trap. All of these factors could have caused some people to compromise, but Daniel and his friends remained faithful to their God⁴

1:8. Nebuchadnezzar had made abundant provision for the captives. Theirs was a life of luxury, not deprivation, for they were given a portion of **food and wine** daily from the king's own table. However, this food did not conform to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. The fact that it was prepared by Gentiles rendered it unclean. Also no doubt many things forbidden by the Law were served on the king's table, so to partake of such food would defile the Jewish youths. Further, without doubt this royal food had been sacrificed and offered to pagan gods before it was offered to the king. To partake of such food would be contrary to Exodus 34:15, where the Jews were forbidden to eat flesh sacrificed to pagan gods.

Similar problems would arise in drinking the wine. To abstain from the Old Testament prohibition against "strong drink" (e.g., Prov. 20:1, KJV; Isa. 5:11, "drinks"), Jews customarily diluted wine with water. Some added 3 parts of water to wine, others 6 parts, and some as much as 10 parts of water to 1 part of wine. The Babylonians did not dilute their wine. So both the food and the drink would have defiled these Jewish young men. Daniel knew the requirements of the Law governing what he should and should not eat and drink.

Daniel's desire was to please God in all he did. So he **resolved** that even though he was not in his own land but in a culture that did not follow God's laws, he would consider himself under the Law. He therefore **asked the chief court official** to be excused from eating and drinking the food and wine generously supplied by the king. Daniel was courageous, determined, and obedient to God. The chief official's reticence to grant Daniel's request is understandable. He was responsible to oversee the young captives' physical and mental development so they would become prepared for the roles **the king** had in mind for them. Evidently these youths held a strategic place in the king's plans, so he wanted them well trained. If the men had been of little

⁴ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 66–68.

consequence to **the king**, their physical conditions would not have mattered and Ashpenaz would not have risked the loss of his life.

Daniel had trusted his situation to God who intervened on Daniel's behalf to move the official's heart **to show favor** (*hesed*, "loyal love") **and sympathy** (*raḥmîm*, "compassion") **to Daniel**.

1:11–14. When Daniel's request seemed to have been denied by **the chief official ... Daniel** approached **the guard whom** Ashpenaz placed over the four youths and requested a **10-day** trial period in which **Daniel** and his companions would be given only **vegetables ... and water**. (The Heb. word for vegetables, meaning "sown things," may also include grains.) **Since the Mosaic Law** designated no vegetables as unclean, Daniel could eat any vegetables put before him without defiling himself. In so short a time (**10 days**) there could have been no marked deterioration that would jeopardize the life of anyone in authority. In fact Daniel hinted that their **appearance** would be better than that of the others who were on the king's diet.

Since the guard was under the chief official's authority he must have acted not on his own but with permission from Ashpenaz. This indicates that God intervenes on behalf of those who trust Him, and protects and preserves those who obey Him, even under pagan rule.⁵

8–17. The test of piety demanded by Daniel. **8.** Dan. made up his mind not to defile himself with the heathen foods, and proffered his petition to the Chief Eunuch that he might be excused; the sequel shows that he was also speaking for his companions. VLeng. first exhibited at length the motives for this abstention: the scruples against meats sacrificed 'with the blood' (so PsSa.) and probably εἰδωλόθυτα, **Acts 15:29, and against wine as generally graced with a religious libation (cf. 1 Cor. 10:21),** while at least the later law was peculiarly rigorous against

⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, "[Daniel](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1331.

PsSa. Pseudo-Saadia (comm.).

the defilement of drinkables and their vessels. Jos. gives a parallel in his anecdote of the pious Jews in whose cause he went to Rome, who lived only on figs and nuts, *Life*, §3. So Judas and his company preferred to live in the mountains like wild beasts and to eat grasses to escape pollution, 2 Mac. 5:27. The scruple is finer than that exhibited in 1 Mac. 1:62 ff., etc., where Jews resisted the compulsory eating of taboo foods. We may rather compare the pious practice of Tobit, who abstained from eating the food of the Gentiles, Tob. 1:10 f., and of Esther, who acc. to a Gr. addition to Est. 4 (1:2–8) pleaded to God that she had not eaten of Haman's table or honored the king's symposium or drunk wine of oblations. The story of Judith first illustrates the practice of a Jew carrying a wallet (πήρα = N. T. κόφινος, the *cophinus* of the satirists) to avoid contamination from unclean foods, Jud. 10:5, etc. The extreme of this principle is summed up in Jub. 22:16, 'Separate thyself from the nations and eat not with them'; with which *cf.* and contrast the story of Peter in Acts 10. For this Jewish regulation of life s. Schürer, *GJV* 2, 91 ff. It is accordingly quite out of question to compare Esther's fasting, Est. 4:17, or to suppose that Dan.'s action was tinged with asceticism (so Whiston to Jos., *l.c.*, Aph. Syr., Albert Magnus, Knab.), or was symptomatic of early Essenism (so Behr., p. xxv), or to rationalize with Jos. and Calv. and to think of a puritanic discipline of body and mind. Issue must be taken with vLeng., *al.*, that this feature implies the Macc. puritanism; *cf.* Tobit, while the practice was logically based on the Law; *cf.* Eze. *passim*, Is. 52:11; Zech. 14:21, etc.⁶ Divine grace prompted

Jos. Josephus.

Gr. Greek; version

N. T. New Testament.

Jos. Josephus.

Aph. Syr. Aphrem Syrus (comm.).

Knab. Knabenbauer (comm.).

Behr. Behrmann (comm.).

Jos. Josephus.

Calv. Calvin (comm.).

⁶ James A. Montgomery, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 130–131.

the official to a sympathetic reply. Jewish romance always represents its heroes as on good terms with officialdom, *cf.* Esther, the story of Joseph the Tobiade in⁷

That Daniel's God was not asleep but in full command of the situation is indicated by the name for deity selected by the author. In v. 2 the word translated "Lord" is not Yahweh (represented in the NIV by "LORD") but *'ādōnay*, and this fact is significant. "Owner, ruler, or sovereign" is the meaning of *'ādōnay*, the equivalent of *kyrios* in the New Testament and in the LXX and Theodotion. By the use of this expression, Daniel was emphasizing the sovereignty of Yahweh, which is the dominant theme of the book.

"Delivered" is literally the Hebrew word *nātan*, "gave." It was not Nebuchadnezzar's military might or brilliance that brought about the downfall of Jerusalem, but it was the sovereign will of God. "Kings like to think themselves sufficient as ruler, but they are as much under the supreme control of God as any person."¹¹ God in his sovereignty had permitted Nebuchadnezzar to come against Judah in order to judge Jehoiakim and the sinful nation (cf. 2 Chr 36:5; Hab 1–2). For hundreds of years the Lord had warned his wayward people to repent or face judgment, but they had not listened to his servants the prophets (cf. 9:6). Moses had even predicted Israel's captivity as a consequence of forsaking the Lord (cf. Deut 28:36–37, 49–68). God had been patient, but Israel's sin had now reached its limits, and judgment fell.

⁷ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 131.

NIV *New International Version*

LXX *Septuagint*

¹¹ L. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 30.

“Some of the articles from the temple of God” included the gold and silver cups and utensils used in the temple ceremonies in Jerusalem. Hezekiah had shown the Babylonians these treasures one hundred years before (cf. Isa 39:2, 4), and Isaiah had predicted that someday they would be taken to Babylon (Isa 39:6). Nebuchadnezzar appropriated only part (“some”) of the treasures of the temple at this time; the rest would be taken in subsequent invasions. About sixty-six years later Belshazzar would bring these vessels into his feast and desecrate them (cf. 5:2–4). These objects were seized because of their value (gold and silver) and as trophies of war (cf. 1 Sam 5:2; 21:9).

“From the temple of God” is literally “from the house of *the* God.” Young observes that Daniel “always prefixes the definite article, *the* God, an incidental evidence of the unity of the book.”¹² The opposition in this verse between “*the* God” and “his god” may reflect the author’s belief that Yahweh was not just one God among the many in the Babylonian pantheon,¹³ but he was *the* God. Yahweh is the real God; all other gods are illusions.

The victorious king carried these treasures to Babylon (located in Modern Iraq) and placed them in “the temple of his god.” Nebuchadnezzar’s name contains the designation of the god Nabu/Nebo, but “his god” probably refers to Marduk (Bel), the chief god of Babylon who of course was worshiped by the king. Goldingay notes that “Nebuchadnezzar’s inscriptions refer most to Marduk, Nabu being his father’s god.”¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar also named his son Amel-Marduk (called Evil-Merodach in Jer 52:31–34 and 2 Kgs 25:27–30), which means “man of Marduk,” suggesting that his principal god was Marduk.

“In Babylonia” is literally “to the land of Shinar.” Shinar is used elsewhere in the Old Testament as a designation for Babylon (Isa 11:11; Zech 5:11). Baldwin remarks: “*The land of Shinar* is a deliberate archaism.... Shinar, site of the tower of Babel (Gn 11:1–9; cf. 10:10), was synonymous with opposition to God; it was the place where wickedness was at home (Zc 5:11) and uprightness could expect opposition.”¹⁵

2. Introduction to Daniel and His Friends (1:3–7)

(1) Social Status (1:3)

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—

¹² E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 38.

¹³ *IBHS* § 13.6a explains אֱלֹהִים as an intrinsically definite noun that with the article becomes a proper name. For a discussion of these pagan deities, see A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 194–96.

¹⁴ J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 15.

¹⁵ J. G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 78.

1:3 “Court officials” is a translation of the Hebrew *sārîs*. A *sārîs* could refer to a literal eunuch (cf. Isa 56:3), but the term also was employed in a general sense to designate any official. For example, this same expression describes the Egyptian official Potiphar, who was married (Gen 37:36). Archer points out that *sārîs* is derived from the Akkadian *ša rēši šarri* (“he who is of the king’s head”) and “had no original connotation of sexual impotence.”¹⁶ Therefore it is not necessary to assume that Ashpenaz or Daniel and his three friends (as Josephus hinted¹⁷) were made literal eunuchs. Since the king wanted young men who were “without any physical defect” (v. 4), we may assume they were not mutilated in this manner. Likely it was only those in charge of the king’s harems who were made eunuchs.

Nebuchadnezzar took Israelite (a general designation for the chosen people here) captives¹⁸ only “from the royal family” (lit., “from the seed of the kingship”) and from “the nobility.” Daniel and his friends fit into at least one of the two named categories, most likely both. Slotki may be correct in seeing only one category of Israelite captive here.¹⁹ He understands the Hebrew conjunction to be used in an explanatory sense that would result in the meaning “from the royal family, even from the nobility (or foremost leaders).”²⁰ All four young men were from the tribe of Judah and, if Slotki is correct, from the line of the kings. Even if there are two classes, the likelihood is that Daniel was of royal birth. Josephus declared that Daniel and his three friends were members of Zedekiah’s family.²¹ At any rate, these teenage boys were from families of high social standing. Concerning the purpose of taking these captives, Baldwin comments, “A few choice hostages from the Judean court would weaken resources there, prove useful to the conqueror and reinforce Judah’s vassal status.”²² This passage demonstrates at least a partial fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that descendants of Hezekiah would be taken as officials to Babylon (cf. Isa 39:7).

(2) Qualifications (1:4a)

¹⁶ Archer, “Daniel,” 33; also Hartman and Di Lella, *Daniel*, 129; Lacocque, *Daniel*, 21–22.

¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.10.1.

¹⁸ “Bring in” most likely refers to the fact that the captives were brought from Palestine to Babylon rather than with Young, that they already were in Babylon and merely were brought into the king’s palace (Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 39).

¹⁹ J. J. Slotki, *Daniel-Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: Soncino, 1978), 2.

²⁰ The Hebrew would even allow three categories—Israelites, members of the royal family (Babylonian or Israelite), and members of the nobility (Babylonian or Israelite); but the context would argue against it.

²¹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.10.1.

²² Baldwin, *Daniel*, 79.

⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace.

1:4a A number of qualifications were necessary before young men were eligible for training in Babylon. The trainees had to be a certain age. "Young men" is the translation of the Hebrew word *yēlādîm* (singular, *yeled*), which may refer to children, boys, or young men. Young points out that according to Plato (*Alcibiades* 1.121), "the education of Persian youths began in their 14th year,"²³ and it is reasonable to assume that the Babylonians commenced the training of young people at about the same age as the Persians. Daniel then would likely have been about fourteen or fifteen years of age when he was taken into captivity and began his training. Nebuchadnezzar wanted boys at a "teachable age"²⁴ so they would be able and willing to learn new things.

Daniel and his friends also were required to be in good physical health ("without any physical defect") so that their performance in the king's service might not be inhibited. That the defect in question was of a physical nature is made clear from an examination of Lev 21:17–21. In Lev 21:17–18, 21 the equivalent Hebrew term *mûm*²⁵ is used to forbid a priest from serving in the sanctuary if he has any physical "defect."²⁶ The same Hebrew term also delineated physically defective animals that were excluded from sacrifice (Lev 22:20). A pleasing appearance ("handsome"; lit., "good of appearance") was also a consideration for service in the court at Babylon.

Intelligence was of the utmost importance to Nebuchadnezzar. "Showing aptitude" is a translation of the Hebrew word *maškilîm* (root=*šākal*, "to be prudent"), which means in this verbal form "having insight" or "comprehension."²⁷ Here it speaks of the ability to learn or comprehend information. "For every kind of learning" is literally "in all wisdom (*bēkol-ḥokmâ*)" and would include secular as well as religious instruction. "Well informed" literally reads "knowers of [*yōdē'ê*] knowledge [*da'at*]." Rather than "well informed," the idea probably is that these young men had the ability to acquire ("know") knowledge because they were intelligent. "Quick to understand" is literally "understanders of (*mēbînê*) knowledge (*maddâ*)."²⁸

²³ Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 42.

²⁴ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 120.

²⁵ The *kethiv* in Dan 1:4 is **דִּימָן** but the *qere* is **דִּימָן**.

²⁶ One of the defects listed is "damaged testicles" (Lev 21:20), which would seem to demonstrate that in Dan 1:4 the phrase "without any defect" would specifically rule out the youths' being made eunuchs.

²⁷ BDB, 968.

²⁸ The terms **יָדָע** and **יָדָעוּ** seem to be synonyms. Both come from the root **יָדָע**, "to know."

Wood²⁹ and Leupold³⁰ maintain that the above three expressions reflect different aspects of the boys' intelligence, but in this context the phrases appear to be virtually synonymous. Montgomery seems correct in stating, "The three phrases used of the youths' mental qualifications are simply accumulative and do not permit analysis into distinct mental functions."³¹ All that seems intended by these expressions is that the Jewish boys were intelligent and learned quickly. The three phrases suggest Nebuchadnezzar's stress on intellectual ability.

Young men inducted into the king's service also had to be "qualified to serve in the king's palace." This phrase literally reads "who [had] power to stand in the palace of the king." "To stand" before the king is an idiom for serving the king (cf. 1 Kgs 10:8; 12:8). "Power" (*kōah*) here denotes "ability" and refers to "a proper manner, poise, confidence, and knowledge of social proprieties"³² expected at the royal court. Daniel and his friends were to be trained as counselors to Nebuchadnezzar (or at least as some kind of officials who would give an account to him). In that capacity they would literally "stand" in the king's presence to respond to his bidding.

(3) Privileged Status (1:4b–5)

He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

1:4b A privileged education was provided for the young men. They learned to speak and write the language of Babylon, which was a form of Akkadian known as Neo-Babylonian.³³ Akkadian was written in cuneiform, which was made up of wedge-shaped characters, commonly engraved on clay tablets. Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of these texts.³⁴ Daniel and his friends would have known several other languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, and, later, Persian.

²⁹ Wood, *Daniel*, 33.

³⁰ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (1949; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 60.

³¹ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 120; cf. Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 41. This knowledge and learning ability seems to speak of that possessed at the time of their captivity and not to their subsequent learning activities. For a discussion see Montgomery, *Daniel*, 120.

³² Wood, *Daniel*, 33.

³³ Although Aramaic was spoken in the sixth-century B.C. as the language of diplomacy, official records of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from this period were written in Akk. cuneiform, and there seems to be no reason to doubt that a form of Akk. was the common speech of Babylon's citizens.

³⁴ Wiseman reports that only recently in Nebuchadnezzar's *Nabû ša harê* temple almost a thousand new tablets were discovered (*Nebuchadnezzar*, 86).

The Hebrews studied the extensive body of literature preserved in their new home. Babylon was the learning center of the day and had acquired the remarkable library left by the Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal (669–626 B.C.). According to Wiseman, Babylonian texts indicate that the schools of the day copied sign lists, word lists, paradigms, legal materials, all kinds of religious documents, fables, omen texts including those about “devils and evil spirits,” astrological and mathematical texts, economic data, as well as historical materials.³⁵ Obviously Babylon’s religious teachings (which Driver calls “a systematized superstition”³⁶) were part of the youths’ instruction, but this should occasion no difficulty. These teenagers had no choice in the matter, and as Young points out, “That the youths did not accept the superstitious and false elements in this *wisdom* is shown by the later examples of their steadfast faith in God.”³⁷ Jerome claimed that the Hebrews studied the Babylonian religion not that they might “follow it themselves, but in order to pass judgment upon it and refute it.”³⁸

“Babylonians” is a translation of the Hebrew word *kaśdîm*, rendered by many translations as “Chaldeans” (or “Chaldaeans”; see 2:2 for a discussion). In Dan 2–5 *kaśdîm* (Aramaic *kaśdāy*, *kaśdā’în*) sometimes designates a special class of Babylonian wise men or priests, and a number of scholars believe that this is its meaning here.³⁹ In that case “the language and literature” would either be the general knowledge of Babylon preserved by this learned class or the particular religious lore practiced by these priests. Most likely *kaśdîm* is used here (also 5:30; 9:1) to refer to Babylonians generally.⁴⁰ Therefore “the language and literature of the Babylonians” would be the general body of knowledge known and studied in Babylon.

1:5 Daniel and his friends received a privileged diet as well. Their food came “from the king’s table” (“royal rations,” NRSV), that is, they ate the very food the king ate. *Pat-bag* (“food,” or perhaps better “rich food”) is a Persian loan word that occurs in the Bible only in Daniel (1:5, 8, 13, 15–16; 11:26). Young correctly notes that the term basically means “assignment,” but in this

³⁵ Ibid., 86–89. See also Goldingay, *Daniel*, 16–18.

³⁶ Driver, *Daniel*, 10.

³⁷ Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 49.

³⁸ Jerome, *Daniel*, 21.

³⁹ E.g., Goldingay, *Daniel*, 16; Leupold, *Daniel*, 61; J. J. Collins, *Daniel*, Her (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 138.

⁴⁰ Cf. Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 41.

case the “assignment” would include food of the best quality.⁴¹ The NIV’s “food” is not incorrect in this context, but “rich food” would capture the idea even better.⁴²

An opportunity to achieve a privileged position in the king’s court was also afforded to the young men. “They were to be trained” (“nourishing them,” KJV) is literally “to make them great [*gādal*].” The Hebrew word is used of raising children (cf. Isa 1:2).

This training period was to continue “for three years” and was intended to prepare the young men to serve the king in some capacity. Young comments: “Plato, *Alcibiades* 1:121, states that the education of Persian youths began in their 14th year, and Xenophon, *Cy.*, 1, 2 mentions the 16th or 17th years as the close. The [Persian] Avesta says that a student for holy training should go to a master for three years.”⁴³ Montgomery relates, “Much later in the old Pers. territory a three years’ course was the vogue in the famous Nestorian school at Nisibis.”⁴⁴ It is reasonable to suppose that the Babylonian training period was similar to that of the Persians and other peoples.

After the successful completion of the three-year training period, the young men were to enter royal service. Evidently the level of governmental responsibility was determined by the king’s examination of the trainees at the end of the program.⁸

⁴¹ Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 42; also Montgomery, *Daniel*, 122.

NIV New International Version

⁴² King Jehoiachin and his family also received an allotment of food while in exile according to 2 Kgs 25:30 and Jer 52:34. Babylonian tablets listing the rations given to Jehoiachin have been found in the royal quarters at Babylon. For the text see *ANET*, 308.

⁴³ Young, *Prophecy of Daniel*, 42.

⁴⁴ Montgomery, *Daniel*, 122.

⁸ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 57–64.

