

# **The Book of Daniel**

## **Lesson 2**

**February 2, 2024**

### **A Workout for the Soul**

Try to put yourself in the place of Daniel and his three friends and ask yourself, honestly, if you would have the spiritual poise, discernment, and courage that they displayed from the beginning. It's very possible that this could be a "dry run" for what our future holds!

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

### **Historical Review: Elements of National Collapse**

1. In 721 B.C., the Northern Kingdom (Israel/Samaria) was overthrown by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:1–18). An estimated 80% of the population was carried away into captivity.
2. Later, in 701 B.C., when the armies of Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, God miraculously delivered the city due to the prayers of Hezekiah and the prophecy of Isaiah (2 Kings 18–19).
3. Due to the foolishness of Hezekiah in showing the wealth of his treasury to an envoy from Babylon, Isaiah then (first) prophesied the coming captivity of Judah (2 Kings 20:12–21, see esp. v. 18). This prophecy was given in 698 B.C.
4. Jeremiah began to prophesy the fall of Jerusalem in 627 B.C. (Jer. Chapters 2–6). His message of warning continued for 40 years until the prophecy was fulfilled in 586 B.C., with the fall of Jerusalem, and the third and final captivity.
5. The end for Judah began with the death of the good king, Josiah, who was killed by Pharaoh Necho at the battle of Megiddo, in 609 B.C. Necho was on his way to the battle of Carchemish when Josiah went out to face him and was killed (2 Kings 23:28–30; 2 Chron. 35:20–25). He was lamented by Jeremiah and all of Judah.
6. At the following battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.), Egypt allied with her old nemesis, Assyria, against the brilliant, upstart commander Nebuchadnezzar (son of king Nabopolassar) of the new kingdom of Babylon, with whom were allied the Medo-Persians and the Scythians. The Assyrian coalition was defeated, and Assyria ceased to exist, so devastating was the defeat.
7. It was after the battle of Carchemish that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem for the first time, and Daniel and about 50 to 70 captives of the royal family were taken captive, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 39:3–6).
8. Daniel's spiritual maturity was legendary, even back in Jerusalem, where the prophet/priest Ezekiel was ministering before he was also taken into captivity (Read Ezek. 12:1–3).

### **Principles of Bible Study to Remember**

Never forget that every Bible teacher is fallible. We who are older may quote something we read forty years ago and get a number or an author wrong. We paraphrase, even as New Testament authors do. Don't fail to check up on us—especially verify our use of Scripture: go to the source!

1. God has invested His power in His Word (Psalm 138:2; Isa. 40:6–8; 55:11; John 1:1–4, 14 Heb. 4:12).
2. There are critical elements that pertain to all truth:
  - a. Truth must be coherent.
  - b. Truth must be consistent (the law of non-contradiction).
  - c. Truth must correlate to life and the world as we know it.
3. Accuracy in Bible study demands adherence to the science of hermeneutics.
  - a. Historical background (Isagogics)—history, culture, language.
  - b. Categorical assimilation—the full picture of any truth/doctrine must be built on all passages concerning that truth correlated.
  - c. Exegetical evidence—the Bible must be interpreted and understood as the original recipients would have comprehended its language.

When Bible terms are interpreted in light of their modern meaning, we do violence to the text and introduce teachings that are contrary to their inspired usage.

### **The Five Cycles of National Discipline (Leviticus 26)**

In Deuteronomy 11:26; 27–28 and 30:15, God made it clear to Israel that their obedience or disobedience to the covenant would bring either blessing or cursing. God had warned, in Leviticus 26, of five cycles of increasing discipline that the nation would experience if they continued in unfaithfulness:

1. Cycle one: vv. 14–17.
2. Cycle two: vv. 18–20.
3. Cycle three: vv. 21–22.
4. Cycle four: vv. 23–26.
5. Cycle five: vv. 27–39.

Take note that each new cycle begins with words to the effect, “*And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins*” (vv. 18, 21, 23, 27). By the end of the fifth and final cycle, the nation is overrun by enemies and the people are scattered and desolate.

By the time of Daniel and Ezekiel, the nation was entering into the fifth and final cycle of discipline, and by 586 B.C., had ceased to exist.

### **Daniel 1:1–8, Major Lessons to Learn**

1. When a nation enlightened with the true knowledge of God turns away to apostasy and degeneracy, God will reject that nation and withdraw His protection and blessings (read Dan. 1:1–2), “*The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.*”

2. When a nation rejects humble submission to God, they will be placed into forced subjection to those whose gods they worship (Dan. 1:2b). *“And he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.”* Because the worship of the false gods of the Gentiles had dominated Israel, God gave them into the hands of those gods.

*“The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” – 1 Corinthians 10:20–22)*

3. Even in a time of national collapse, God is able to deliver those who remain faithful to Him (Dan. 1:3–6). It is estimated that in this first deportation, between 50 to 70 young men were taken. Of that number, only four of them were outstanding for their faithfulness.
4. Where evil prevails over righteousness, and darkness obscures the light, there will always be an attempt (subtle or forceful) at mind control and psychological re-orientation (Dan. 1:7).

**Note:** Different sources give various meanings of the following names:

- a. **“Daniel”** = “God is my Judge.” This name indicates that God is the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Psalm 50:4; Isa. 3:13; Matt. 25:31–32; Heb. 12:23). He also, in His matchless grace, judged His own Son on behalf of sinful mankind (John 3:16–19; 2 Cor. 5:21). Daniel’s name was changed to “Belteshazzar,” meaning either “Bel’s prince” (an Akkadian god) or, “Lady, protect the king” (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Old Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck). This is probably a reference to Ishtar, the fertility goddess of Babylon.
  - b. **“Hananiah”** = “The Lord is gracious”, and was changed to “Shadrach,” which is “illuminated by the sun god.”
  - c. **“Mishael”** = “Who and what is the Lord?” We know that *“God is light”* (1 John 1:5–6), and *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8, 16). No god of the heathen ever has these qualities. The name change to “Meshach” means “who is like Ishtar” or “the god whom I fear.”
  - d. **“Azariah”** = “The Lord is my help,” became “Abednego,” “servant of Nebo,” the Akkadian god of wisdom.
5. There is a time to feast and a time to fast (Dan. 1:8). The problem here was neither a question of meat nor wine, both of which were common in Israel. Daniel and his friends were not advocating vegetarianism! Rather, the food of the king’s table was first sacrificed or poured out in offering to their gods. This made it defiled according to the dietary laws of Israel (Leviticus 11). These restrictions are not binding, but a matter of conscience, to Church Age believers (Mark 7:19; Acts 15:29; Rom. 14:2–4, 14–17; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:28).

In Mark 2:18–20, the issue was made that the disciples of John fasted, yet the disciples of Jesus were always feasting. Jesus declared that the friends of the Bridegroom are not going to fast at the wedding. While He was present with them, it was a time for joyous celebration.

*“But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast in those days.” – Mark 2:20*

6. Daniel's decision, which was then joined by the other three, was to control what they could in maintaining faithfulness to the covenant obligations of Israel. They maintained a focus on revealed truth and were blessed by God for their dedication.
7. In their first conflict with a non-believing, heathen power, Daniel and company were able to appeal for leniency and proved that it did not hinder, but rather enhanced, their fitness to serve in the administration of Nebuchadnezzar.

**Conclusion: Victorious Faith over Disastrous Circumstance (vv. 1–8)**

Jesus told His disciples:

*“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* – John 16:33

Many years later, the apostle John remembered these words and wrote:

*“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* – 1 John 5:4–5

And even again, looking far into the future of the Tribulation saints, he wrote:

*“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”* – Revelation 12:11

These verses are simply the New Testament fulfillment of Old Testament promises. In this section, Daniel and friends proved the truth of Isaiah 40:31,

*“But those who wait on the Lord  
Shall renew [exchange] their strength;  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.”*

This verse is the promise of supernatural strength, which is displayed in the lives of those who “*wait on the Lord.*” The word in Hebrew for “wait” is *Chavah*—the strongest word for faith in Hebrew. It is a word that means “to bind together by twisting, to make a rope.” The idea is the bringing together of promises, principles, and doctrines (note the progression), over a long period of time. It suggests the process of spiritual growth leading to a level of maturity. It is going “*from strength to strength*” (Psalm 84:7).

**Daniel 1:9–16, Divine Favor and the Power of Appeal**

Daniel's appeal was to a lower official than Ashpenaz (vv. 3, 8). He is called a “*steward*” (*Melzar*—Persian derivative, “butler,” cf. Gen. 40:1, 5). Often a lesser, or “local,” official will be more sympathetic and flexible than the higher officials. There is a book entitled, “*The Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates,*” by Matthew J. Trewhella that deals with the historical use of local magistrates to thwart higher tyrannical authority. One example in America would be county sheriffs standing against the overreach of both Federal and State violations of the Constitution.

The word translated “vegetables” in vv. 12, 16 is not accurate. “*The word used here generally refers to the seeds used for animal feed ... cereal grains ... cooked in water to produce a porridge.*” (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary* – Walton, Matthews, Chavalas).

**Note:** God blessed these four for their faithfulness and obedience, by granting them wisdom, skill, and understanding in all their training. Daniel, the obvious leader, was granted even greater spiritual insight into visions and dreams—this will be a skill he uses throughout the book.

### **Daniel’s Discernment**

*“If any of you lacks wisdom [who doesn’t?], let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” – James 1:5*

1. Daniel had discernment regarding historical events, vv. 1–4. He had learned the lessons taught by the prophet Jeremiah.
2. He had discernment regarding faithful conduct in a hostile environment, vv. 5–9. He knew where to draw the line—what he could affect, and what he couldn’t. He had discernment in discovering the means to accomplish his goal of faithful obedience, vv. 10–14. This was a very reasonable request, which would not endanger the “steward” in any way.
3. Daniel had discernment in the ways of God, vv. 15–21 (see Psalm 103:7 and Heb. 3:10 for contrast).
4. All of this has the providence of God behind it. God gave him favor (v. 9), wisdom (v. 17), and success (vv. 19–20). Daniel outlived all the other three friends, living to see the captives return after the 70 years captivity (books of Ezra, Nehemiah).

**God blesses His Word wherever it is found!**