

*Commentary for Lesson 6*

*July 12, 2020*

## **Wisdom to Navigate Life's Challenges**

**Focal Passage: Daniel 1:8-17**

**Background Text: Daniel 1:1-17**

**Note:** For those readers who use supplementary commentaries to prepare for each week's lesson, we will post downloadable commentary on [AdultBibleStudies.com](http://AdultBibleStudies.com) through the summer quarter. We will publish an annual commentary for purchase for Fall 2020–Summer 2021.

### **Daniel the Man**

What we know of Daniel's personal background comes from Daniel 1:3-4. Daniel was from an honored and privileged Israelite family. This may be one of the reasons that he was taken to Babylon in 605 BC. In 598 and 587, the Babylonians also took many Israelite leaders and artisans into exile. When Daniel went to live in Babylon, he was probably in his late teens. He was a well-educated, intelligent, and handsome young man.

Like most upper-class Israelite boys of his time, Daniel was probably educated at home, where he was taught the history of his people and of God's covenant with Israel. He was probably also instructed in the ethical conduct of life, as well as in reading and writing.

During his time in Babylon, Daniel learned the Babylonian language and script and was probably taught Babylonian history as well. He became an able administrator in the governments of Babylon and Persia and led a prosperous life.

The Israelites brought their sacred writings with them into exile, and Daniel continued to study them. He also observed the personal rituals of his faith, such as prayer, meditation, and fasting.

Daniel knew about dreams and about their interpretation. He had visions from God concerning great mysteries. He was a man of courage and conviction. Though he knew how to flourish in a pagan society, he also continued to live out his faith in God.

Indeed, the fundamental fact about Daniel is his reliance on God. Daniel was an outstanding man who is renowned to later generations for his wisdom and courage. But it is to God that Daniel gave the praise and credit for all his accomplishments.

### **Introduction (Daniel 1:1-2)**

These verses introduce the book as a whole as well as the first chapter. The setting and time for the beginning of Daniel's story are established.

The third year of Jehoiakim is 605 BC. Jeremiah 25:1 says that Jehoiakim's fourth year as king of Judah was Nebuchadnezzar's first year as king of Babylon. Jeremiah and Daniel are apparently both correct because they used different systems of dating these events.

The Babylonian method of record-keeping did not count the months between a king's coronation and the next new year as part of his official reign. The months between September 605 and April 604 are known as Nebuchadnezzar's ascension year. Daniel used this Babylonian method of dating.

Jeremiah used the method common in Judah, which counted the ascension months as the first year. Thus, Jehoiakim's third year as king (Daniel) and fourth year as king (Jeremiah) were 605.

### **The Youths Get Special Treatment (Daniel 1:3-7)**

The chief eunuch was in charge of the king's harems and of the education of royal young people. The Hebrew youths (children or adolescents) were probably brought to Babylon and to the palace because of their beauty and intelligence. In the deportations of 597 and 587, the Babylonians took the leading citizens and artisans of Jerusalem into exile. Daniel and his friends may have been taken to Babylon in 605 as a gesture of Nebuchadnezzar's power over Judah and as potential servants in Nebuchadnezzar's government.

The further education of the Hebrew youths was to make them able servants (able to enter the king's court or service) of their new master. This education may have included the study of literature, language, astrology, astronomy, math, and medicine.

Daniel and his friends were given Babylonian names. This was probably a convenience for the Babylonians and a symbol of their transition into a new rank and a new life.

### **The Hebrew Youths Are Tested (Daniel 1:8-16)**

Daniel accepted his new position in the king's household, accepted a new name and a Babylonian education, but he would not accept the king's rich food. This rich food was a gift of honor from the king's table, but Daniel refused the gift.

Eating some of this food (pork, for example) would have violated the dietary laws of Daniel's faith (Deuteronomy 14; Leviticus 11). Also, refusing this food was a way of putting distance between himself and Nebuchadnezzar. In ancient times, shared meals were a sign of friendship, and covenant ceremonies sometimes included meals. By refusing the gift of rich food, Daniel refused to give unconditional loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar.

The combination of God's favor (verse 9) and a vegetarian diet (verse 12) made the Hebrew youths healthier than the rest of their fellow students. So the steward kept on taking away the rich food.

### **The Hebrew Youths Excel in Wisdom (Daniel 1:17-21)**

The story again affirms that God was at work in the lives of Daniel and his friends. They were ten times wiser than the Babylonian practitioners of magical arts because wisdom given by God is always ten times better than human wisdom alone. The number *ten* symbolizes completeness.

The youths, particularly Daniel, were wiser in every way. Daniel had special insight into dreams and visions, into a different dimension of reality. Thus, the stage was set for what happens in the rest of the book.

Verse 21 says that Daniel was there (perhaps meaning in the city of Babylon) until the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia (539/538).

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