

Daniel Granted Unusual Favor by God

Our study is about a young man named Daniel. We have already discovered in our previous studies that he was probably about sixteen years old when he was taken captive by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 1:1-2 tell us that he was removed from the city of Jerusalem and taken to the city of Babylon, which today would be in modern Iraq. Babylon was only about 30 miles southwest of the city that we know today as Baghdad. Baghdad and Babylon are very close together. This means Daniel and his three friends were taken about 730 miles way from Jerusalem to Babylon. In those days, that would have been a long way away from home. History tells us that not everybody was taken captive. More than likely his own family was left behind, including his parents.

EVIL KING JEHOIAKIM.

During his childhood, Daniel grew up under a good king, King Josiah. Josiah loved God more than any other king before him. He loved God with all of his heart, soul, and mind. If we study

the chronology, we learn that Daniel would have been about twelve years old when King Josiah died and his son, Jehoiakim, assumed the throne of Judah.

Scripture tells us that Jehoiakim was an evil king. 2 Kings 23:37 tells us that,

He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. 2 Kings 23:37 (NASB)

There were three kings of Judah who were not evil. They were King Asa, King Josiah, and King Hezekiah. The typical kings

of Judah were evil. King Jehoiakim was not just like most of the kings. He was an exceptionally evil king. Daniel would have seen this transition from King Josiah to King Jehoiakim, from a good king to an evil king.

2 Kings 23:34-36 and Jeremiah 22:13-18 list the sins that King Jehoiakim committed. We are told he did not pay people the proper wages they deserved. He taxed the people excessively. He wasted their money by buying things for himself. He abandoned God and he worshiped other gods. He worshiped idols. He was self-willed and disobedient. Israel was in extremely dark days. This reminds us of the U.S. today.

The United States is in dark days. We have people who are suffering under heavy taxation. Our government is

taking from one person to give to another person. They are giving our money to our enemies. Our government is wasting our money. Today, we have a great debt of \$17 trillion. It is about 50 percent of

all of the money that is generated annually in the United States in one year. We are borrowing one dollar for every dollar that we spend. Our politicians are ignoring and at times openly breaking our laws. In fact, it appears at times that our politicians are above the law. Our justice is no longer blind. Justice now seems to lift one side of the blindfold and extend preference to some based on race, sex, or wealth.

Many of our churches today are increasingly abandoning God. They are like the Pharisees of old. Our churches are given to form or ritual. What really counts, we are told, is our external behavior, not what we are like on the inside. We are



ignoring sin, just as the priests did in the Old Testament. One pastor made the comment that he does not really preach about sin anymore because it makes people feel uncomfortable; so he soft pedals the idea of sin in his preaching. He is not alone; many preachers do not mention sin very often. Much of the preaching is about how you can improve yourself, how you can have a better life, how you can fix your family, etc. Sin is minimized more and more. Increasingly many pastors are like the priests in the Old Testament. Check out Malachi 2. There we are told the priests abandoned the teaching of scripture. They were partial in their teaching.

Increasingly, that is true of our churches. We are not very concerned about teaching what God said and how we can make the Bible meaningful to the people. We are ignoring the literal, plain sense, understanding of scripture. This occurs sometimes because the Bible conflicts with the doctrine a pastor learned in seminary. So the message of the text is ignored. Just as the days of King Jehoiakim were dark, so it is in the United States. If you were Daniel in a foreign country, what would you do?

DANIEL IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BABYLON. We saw in our last study that Daniel was on the fast track to becoming one of the officials in King Nebuchadnezzar's government. What would you do? What kind of decisions would you have to face? Daniel 1:8 is the first verse in our study. We will learn what Daniel did in this new land.

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Daniel 1:8 (NASB)

Daniel Chose to not Defile Himself. Here we are told two key decisions that Daniel made. The first key decision is described in the first part of the verse. We are told, "But Daniel made up his mind." The actual Hebrew means that he set his heart. But "made up his mind" is a good translation because in the Old Testament "heart" often meant "mind" or the thinking process. The best translation is that he made up his mind. That is, he made a good decision very early in his captivity. Now think with me for a minute. Daniel is on the fast track to being an official of the government of King Nebuchadnezzar.

He makes up his mind that he will not defile himself with the king's choice food. Now, this could have been a difficult decision for him.

Think about it for a second. We will soon learn that Daniel is in a three-year program of education. At the end of that period of education, he will be tested. If he passes the test, he will become part of the officials of the Babylonian Empire, and have direct contact with King Nebuchadnezzar. This means Daniel has made a very difficult decision because he has to struggle with the fact that King Nebuchadnezzar has planned this menu for these men. He could make the king angry and be rejected.

The menu the king had set for these men was a gourmet menu. You ask, "How do we know it was a gourmet menu?" The reason we know it was a gourmet menu is because the Hebrew word that is translated here as "food" is *patbag*. It almost reminds me of Baggin's sandwiches! But this Hebrew word *patbag* means "rich food." Now, I do not know what you think of when you think of rich food. Maybe you think of Porterhouse steaks, or shrimp. When we are told that Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, the young man had made a significant decision. He had determined not to partake of the rich food and the wine the king had planned for these young men. Now that had to have been a difficult decision. The potential response of the king could have been very negative. The king might have been insulted. If the king was insulted, his reaction might have not been what Daniel expected.

We are going to discover later in Daniel 2 and 3 that the king was a no-nonsense man. In Daniel 2 we are told the king had a dream about a statue. He was troubled about this particular dream. As a result, he called his officials and told them that they had to do two things if they wanted to live and not have their houses turned into rubble. First, they had to describe his dream. Then they had to give him the interpretation of the dream. The officials protested, "Nobody has ever asked anybody to do this." In other words, the king did not tell them what the dream was and so they had a problem. If they did not tell him what his dream was along with the interpretation, he was going to kill them and destroy their homes. That is the type of king with whom Daniel was dealing. If Daniel insulted

the king, what might have happened to Daniel?

Now, I can hear somebody asking, “Daniel, who back home will know what you are doing? You are all alone. Who will know, and who will care here in this place? You can indulge! Go ahead!” Or how about this rationalization? To refuse to eat the food would spoil any opportunity for future advancement. Even if the king was not extremely offended, maybe he would just hold it against you, and deny you the advancement for which you are looking. Another possibility was peer pressure. The whole context of the passage screams that Daniel was standing alone. Only Daniel made the decision. He had three friends. But Daniel was the leader and it was Daniel who made the decision, not his friends. His friends followed his example, after he had made the decision. Daniel made up his mind.

Two more things to think about was that Daniel could have argued, “What else can I do? I do not like vegetables. What else can I eat? I have to do this. It is the only food available.” Those are the types of issues that I suspect many people have struggled with over the years. “What can I do about the situation? I have to cooperate. God will understand.” But that was not Daniel’s response. Daniel did not say, “God will understand.” If Daniel actually struggled with any or all of these questions, there is one thing we confidently know. He made the correct decision. We are told that he made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food.

Some people have asked, “What was wrong with the food? What could possibly have been wrong with the food or the wine?” One possibility is that Daniel had taken a Nazirite vow. The primary problem with that view is that somebody who took a Nazirite vow was only forbidden from drinking wine. There were no restrictions about food. So that suggestion does not help us understand why he refused the food and the wine.

Another possibility is that the meat was a violation of the Mosaic Law. We learn in Genesis 9:4 that Noah was told we can eat meat, but not meat with the blood together. Every time I think about meat and blood together, I think about blood pudding. I was in England some years ago. I could have bought a dish called blood pudding. That was forbidden by Genesis 9.

Some think Leviticus 11 provides the answer. The chapter provides a list of all the different kinds of animals that could be eaten, and the ones that could not be eaten. There is a shorter

list in Deuteronomy 14:3-20. So, maybe that was the reason. A more likely reason might be a combination of forbidden foods and that the food and the wine had been offered to Babylonian gods. Personally, I think the most likely possibility is that the food had been offered to idols.

DANIEL ASKED FOR PERMISSION TO NOT DEFILE HIMSELF. The last part of verse 8 gives us the second decision that Daniel made. We are told,

... he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Daniel 1:8b (NASB)

This was an important decision. He asked for permission to eat vegetables. I do not know how many of you like vegetables. When I was growing up, I did not like vegetables. I remember when I married my wife, I told her, “I am not eating any vegetables any more!” After being married for a while, I changed my mind, but that was my reaction. Verse 8 reveals that Daniel was a serious man of God. Why did Daniel do this?

The first possibility is that he was like the priests in Malachi. In Malachi 1, we are told the priests worshiped God ritually. They were performing sacrifices, serving the Lord, being faithful in their duties to the Lord, but the theme of the chapter is that they did not love God. They did not honor God. They did not respect God. God asked them, “Where is my honor?” They replied, “God, you do not love us!” It becomes very clear in the chapter that the priests did not love God. They did not honor God. Everything they did was ritual. They were doing all of the right things, but they did not do them for the Lord. Later in the chapter they complained, saying, “Oh my, how tiresome this is.” They were tired of serving God. This was not what they really wanted to do. They forced themselves to serve God. Their ministry was tiresome. We could say their ministry was “a pain in the neck.” That might have been Daniel’s heart. Did Daniel just obey all the Jewish rules and regulations out of ritual?

There is another possibility. The other possibility is that he was like King Josiah. He loved God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, and with all of his mind. 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles tell us that almost all Israel’s kings were evil. The patterns of Israel had been evil. But Daniel was different.

Daniel was unusual. Daniel was in Babylon because of the evil of his nation. Verse 9 says,

Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials . . . Daniel 1:9 (NASB)

Why did God do that? Why did God grant Daniel favor and compassion? Let me show you why he was given favor and compassion. In Deuteronomy 5:10, Moses is giving a speech to the Israelites just before they were to enter the promised land. When we come to verse 9, Moses said,

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing . . . Deuteronomy 5:9-10a (NASB)

To whom does God show compassion and kindness?

. . . showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. Deuteronomy 5:10 (NASB)

The message is that those who love Him and keep His commandments are the ones to whom He shows loving kindness. It is a heart issue. I would like to suggest that the reason I think Daniel did what he did was not that he was like the priests in Malachi, but that he had a heart like King Josiah. He loved God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, and he wanted to obey God as a result. Believers all too often detach obedience from love. I would like to make a point that if you try to obey God without love, you are being legalistic. The difference between legalism or ritual and a right response is a heart that loves God and says, "I am going to obey God because I love you, Lord—because I want to! That is why I am going to obey you."

Ezekiel 14:20 tells us something very important about who Daniel is. It says,

“ . . . even though Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either their son or their daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their

righteousness.” Ezekiel 14:20 (NASB)

What is the message? Daniel was a righteous man. In John 14:15 Jesus said,

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. John 14:15 (NASB)

That is why Daniel did what he did.

Verse 10 gives us the response to Daniel's request. Ashpenaz, or . . .

. . . the commander of the officials said to Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.” Daniel 1:10 (NASB)

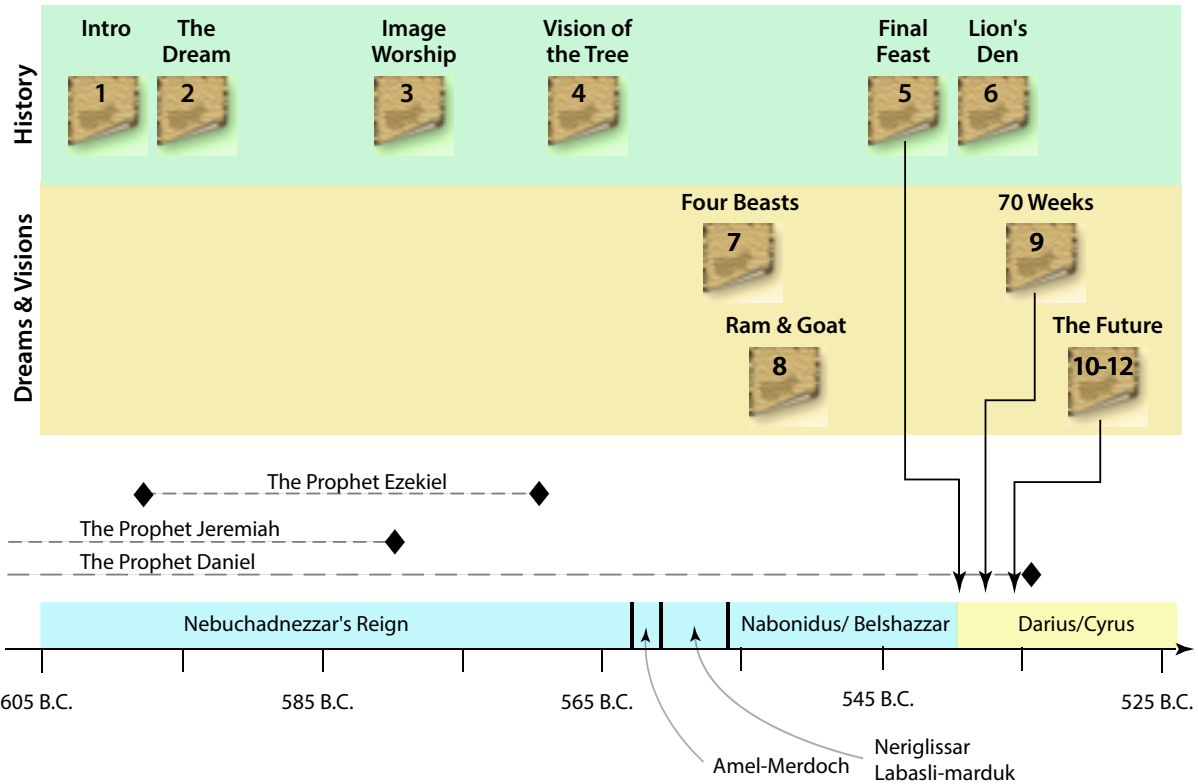
We are told in verse 9 that God has softened Ashpenaz's heart. Then in verse 10 we get an admission from Ashpenaz that he was really struggling with the request because he was concerned that the king might take his head. We need to understand this literally. Nebuchadnezzar was a no-nonsense man. He wanted what he wanted and if you got in the way, he was willing to take your life. Consequently, Ashpenaz struggled with this concern.

When we come to verse 11, we are told,

But Daniel said to the overseer . . . Daniel 1:11 (NASB)

Now there are two things I want to point out. First, the overseer was not Ashpenaz. The Hebrew word is different. That means the overseer is not the commander of the officials. Apparently the overseer is under Ashpenaz, who has responsibility for Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego. So, apparently what happened is that Daniel went to Ashpenaz, asked for permission, and did not immediately receive permission. So Daniel went to the overseer who was appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishal, and Azariah, or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel went to their overseer to make his request.

Outline of Daniel



Copyright © Like The Master Ministries. All Rights Reserved.

Verse 12 and 13 is the request.

Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Daniel 1:12 (NASB)

The Hebrew word that Daniel uses for vegetables here has the idea of seeds that are sown. Daniel is asking for produce that is the result of seeds that were sown and have grown to maturity. That would include foods like grain, fruits, and vegetables. Daniel was asking for something much broader than just carrots or lettuce. The grain would allow for bread to be made. The word includes everything except animal proteins and wine. Then verse 13 adds,

Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food;

and deal with your servants according to what you see. Daniel 1:13 (NASB)

I find this request interesting. It is a surprise because ten days is not enough time to really demonstrate that the change of diet was adequate. It usually takes a number of weeks for a new diet to fully demonstrate its effects. But the idea is that in ten days he would be visibly fatter. I think Daniel did not care about the number of days. I think Daniel was trusting God to change the overseer's perspective. God would be the one who would convince the overseer that this was a good plan. Verses 14-16 tell us what happened.

So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's

choice food. So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables. Daniel 1:14-16 (NASB)

What was the result? God intervened! God convinced the overseer that this was a good thing. This is terrific!! Here is a faithful man who made an important decision. He made a request for something that might not have been his first choice. Think about it. He was going to have a diet of vegetables for three years. He gave up the gourmet food and wine. I can imagine there may have been times when he walked by and saw other people eating their gourmet food and thought to himself, “I wonder what it tastes like.” We can imagine what might have gone through his mind. “What does that taste like?” But Daniel was a serious man of God and chose to do what he knew would please the Lord.

CONCLUSION. Can I ask, “Are you a serious man or woman of God?” Daniel could have just said, “Nobody back home will know the difference.” Everybody else thinks it is a good idea to eat the king’s food. Daniel and his friends were the oddballs, because Daniel was a serious man. He made a serious decision with his friends and hung by his decision for three years. Verse 17 adds,

As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. Daniel 1:17 (NASB)

What did God do for these men? Did you notice verse 2 said, “God gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand”? God gave Jehoiakim to King Nebuchadnezzar. Did you notice verse 9 says, “And God granted”—the actual Hebrew word is “give.” So we can change it this way: “Now God gave Daniel favor and compassion.” Now we are told in verse 17,

And as for these four youths, God gave . . .

Three times in this chapter we are told that God gave, God gave, and God gave. God had an invisible hand controlling everything that happened. God, the master planner, was changing and influencing hearts. We are told in Proverbs that

the heart of a king is like water in God’s hand. God influences people to accomplish His purposes. God gave wisdom, knowledge, a command of literature, and understanding to these four men. Daniel was a serious man.

Verse 18 gives us the conclusion. We are told,

Then at the end of the days . . . Daniel 1:18a (NASB)

This is speaking of the end of the three years of education. That is a long time. I want you to notice the white space between verses 17 and 18. Those two verses are separated by three years of time. Three years elapsed, just like that!

Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 1:18 (NASB)

The men have had three years of education. They have been on a diet of vegetables, fruit and water the entire time. Now they are presented to King Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 19 explains what happened next.

The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s personal service. Daniel 1:19 (NASB)

The date is 602 B.C. The interview was successful. They have graduated and are now in the king’s service. They graduated magna cum laude, at the top of their class! Now verse 20 is the summary. Apparently it is the king’s conclusion. Verse 20 is apparently what the king’s conclusion was about these men. We are told,

As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. Daniel 1:20 (NASB)

I want to direct your attention to the phrase “ten times.” The literal Hebrew means “ten hands.” It does not mean “ten times.” The literal Hebrew, *yad*, is “hands.” This helps us

understand that the expression “ten hands” is a superlative statement. It is a Hebrew superlative. It means that they were superior. I think our Bibles could be better translated as “ten hands,” as opposed to “ten times.” The message is that God gave them the knowledge, the wisdom, and the command of literature.

Verse 21 says:

**And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.
Daniel 1:20 (NASB)**

This verse is telling us that Daniel continued in his position as long as King Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon. After the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon, Cyrus became the king. Then Daniel was no longer in the position in which Nebuchadnezzar had placed him.

This chapter is a beautiful chapter. This chapter has two great truths that continue throughout the book of Daniel. The first truth or thread is that we have a God who is sovereignly in control. We have a God who is the master planner. He is Lord. He is king. He is pulling the strings as He desires. Daniel 4:34-35 reveals we have a faithful God, and He is in total control. Chapter 1 teaches us that our God is in sovereign control.

The second truth is that God rewards a righteous man. God rewarded Daniel, a righteous man, because of his relationship with God. He loved God, and made the decision to obey Him. He was the oddball because he was a righteous man. As I was thinking about this passage, I could not help but be reminded of a principle that is laced all through the Old and New Testaments. Galatians 6:7 tells us this:

**Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows,
this he will also reap. Galatians 6:7 (NASB)**

This divine principle also appears in Jeremiah 29:12-14. The passage says that if we seek and search for God with all of our heart, He will let us find Him. That is reaping what you sow. There is a reward. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says that if we will sow bountifully, we will reap bountifully. The verse is about your giving to the Lord. Matthew 10:40-41 says,

He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. Matthew 10:40-41 (NASB)

The message is that what we sow, we will reap. If we receive a prophet, we get a prophet's reward. If we receive a righteous man, we get a righteous man's reward.

Or how about Matthew 6:33, a very familiar passage to all of us, says,

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

Psalms 18:20 adds,

**The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me.
Psalms 18:20 (NASB)**

The message is if you are a righteous person, God rewards you accordingly. Or how about Matthew 12:36? Jesus is speaking and says,

But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. Matthew 12:36 (NASB)

Did you know that even the words that you speak are being tracked? Do not forget! What you sow, you will reap.

In conclusion, Daniel made the right decision, and God granted him favor in the eyes of the officials. God gave him unusual wisdom, unusual knowledge, unusual understanding, and he was rewarded by being at the top of the class. These are great examples of two divine principles. First, God is sovereign in His actions, and God rewards the righteous man who is serious about the things of God.