

The book of Daniel occupies a pivotal position in Scripture. It begins with the unfaithful children of Israel suffering God's chastisement as they are overthrown and taken from their land. Indeed they have fallen so far from His favor He calls them *Lo-ammi*, not my people, in Hosea 1:8. The whole of the book fits within the 70 years when the Israelites lived as refugees in Babylon, steeped in a culture of idolatry as a cure for their spiritual adultery.

And yet ... Daniel's character and faithfulness to God shine as a light in the long darkness. He serves a succession of kings while rejecting their pagan religion and even draws some to favor him and acknowledge His God. And the book ends with a series of magnificent visions, looking forward through scenes of Gentile dominance, the entrance of a Prince to redeem His people, and with the final act bringing in everlasting righteousness. It is like a prisoner cast into a dungeon, not yielding to despair, until at the end of his sentence a door opens at the far end showing a world more wonderful than he had known before.

Daniel was brought to Babylon as a youth around 600 BC and died sometime after the beginning of Cyrus's reign in 530 BC. The Lord calls him a prophet in Matthew 24 and Ezekiel notes Daniel's wisdom in chapter 28. Ezekiel 14 groups Daniel with Job and Noah. Why these three? Perhaps because each of these stories begins with disaster, tells the story of a single man's dealings with God, and embraces all of mankind in its scope rather than just the Jewish nation thus establishing God's dominion over all rulers and nations.

The book of Daniel has been called the backbone of scriptural prophecy. Certainly it foresees much that follows, most notably the time between the Testaments and the book of Revelation. But Daniel also presents stirring moral lessons for believers of any age. The steadfastness of Daniel and his companions in the

early chapters inspires Christians young and old. And the seventy week prophecy at the end of Chapter 9 could only have been delivered after Daniel's profound prayer of contrition at the beginning. We may well desire to always approach the Almighty with such candor and feeling.

Notes on Chapter 1

1:1 The conquest of Jerusalem, after centuries of appeals by God through his prophets, is told in 2 Kings 24 and 2 Chronicles 36. God could no longer allow His Name to be dishonored among the nations.

1:2 Shinar was the Jews' name for Mesopotamia or Babylonia, the region between the Tigris and Euphrates now found in the nation of Iraq. It lies 500 miles east of Jerusalem as the crow flies but about twice that far along caravan routes.

The vessels plundered from the temple will figure again in chapter 5.

1:3 Prominent servants in Asia courts were often eunuchs even until recent times, as they were seen as incapable of becoming rivals to the king and therefore safe to admit to harems or the circles of power. The law of Moses, however, forbids this practice for Israel in Deuteronomy 23.

1:4 We are not told Daniel's age when he enters Nebuchadnezzar's course of education, but as he was expected to be ready to serve the king at the end of three years, he must have been well into his teens.

1:6-7 Daniel means "God is my judge." His three companions also have variants of God in their names. But their new names assigned by their master include names of pagan gods. Belteshazzar, for example, relates to Baal. If this renaming is an attempt to loosen the men's allegiance to the Hebrew God, it fails utterly.

1:8 The king's food would have included unclean animals, or clean animals not slaughtered in accordance with the law. The law did not forbid wine. We might gather from Daniel 5:1 and Esther 1:10 that wine was often drunk to excess in the Babylonian court. Merely dining apart from the other courtiers may have kept the four companions from possible defilement.

1:8-14 Notice how respectfully Daniel makes his request to the chief of the eunuchs, and how he proposes a test to alleviate his fears of the king's displeasure. There is no hint of sullen defiance.

1:20 The wise men of the Babylonian court are called magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans. (Chaldee was a region of Babylonia, the name of whose inhabitants took on a special meaning.) The men from the east who visited the infant Jesus likely came from this group. We may picture stage magicians or even practitioners of the occult, but they could have been scholars possessing knowledge so uncommon it seemed like magic; for example, astronomers and mathematicians.

1:21 We know that Daniel lived long enough to see the Persian king Cyrus conquer Babylon but we have no record that he ever returned to Jerusalem. God appears to have called him to be His voice in exile.