

Responding to a World Turned Upside Down, Part 2

Daniel 1

III. The Brainwashed Captives (vv. 3 – 7)

³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility,

The Hebrew word for “eunuch” is *sārîs*. It is used 40 times in the Old Testament and is sometimes translated in a general sense to refer to an official or minister of the state. For example, the same word is translated to describe Potiphar as “an officer of Pharaoh” (**Gen. 37:36**). Yet, Potiphar was married. For this reason, commentators disagree on whether Daniel and his three friends were made “eunuchs” to serve in Nebuchadnezzar’s court.

However, the scholars all agree that Daniel and his friends were members “of the royal family and of the nobility.” Remember that Isaiah’s prophecy was that “**some of [Hezekiah’s] own sons**” would “be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs (or officers??) in the palace of the king of Babylon.” (**2 Kings. 20:18**). Therefore, Daniel and his friends were likely cousins within the royal line of Josiah.

^{4a}youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace...

Nebuchadnezzar wanted his future students to be young, good looking, and smart. He was gathering the best and the brightest in Judah, the cream of the crop.

The commentators say the use of the description “youths” would preclude anyone over the age of twenty. Most agree that Daniel and his three friends were between 13 – 17 years of age.

Nebuchadnezzar chose them for the purpose of full indoctrination into Babylonian culture – we might call it ancient brainwashing. The goal was to conform these young men to the ways of Babylon and erase the memory of Israel, and of Israel’s God, from their minds.

^{4b}“...and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”

One commentator said that “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” included two dialects of Sumeria, with certain knowledge of Kassite, which was allied with Hittite and other languages of the immediate neighborhood. Therefore, these captives were being trained to communicate with all the various language groups within the empire. This training would have also included subjects like astronomy, astrology, mathematics and numeration.

Nebuchadnezzar was a shrewd man. He knew that if he could get them into college and control what they read and what they watch and what they learn, he knew he could eventually make them think and act and live like a Babylonian.

⁵The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.

As you can imagine, Nebuchadnezzar ate the best food, and he drank the best wine. In fact, the NASB refers to it as “the king’s choice food.” It was like eating at the White House every night.

One commentator said the goal of this three-year program was “to instill into them a sense of total dependence on Nebuchadnezzar for all of the good things in life.”

Satan is so brilliant, and so shrewd, that he will attack God’s kingdom using a variety of techniques. In some parts of the world, Satan will use severe persecution through fear, intimidation, and even murder to try and thwart God’s kingdom. While in other parts of the world, Satan will use luxury, leisure, and endless hours of streaming and social media to lull Christians asleep and isolate them from God’s influence.

Therefore, be mindful of Paul’s charge in **1 Corinthians 15:58** where he says, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

Outside of the book of Daniel, not much is known of their personal lives. In **Ezekiel 14:14, 20**, “Daniel” is mentioned along with Noah and Job as being men of “righteousness.” Ezekiel was a prophet to the Jewish exiles in Babylon and was a contemporary of “Daniel.” Later, in **Ezekiel 28:3**, we learn that “Daniel” was a wise man.

Additionally, though not mentioned by name, these four young men were likely among those “...who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, [and] quenched the power of fire...” (**Hebrews 11:33 – 34**).

⁷And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

Hebrew		Babylonian	
Name	Meaning	Name	Meaning
Daniel	God is my judge	Belteshazzar	Bel (Baal) provides
Hananiah	The Lord is gracious	Shadrach	Command of Aku (moon god)
Mishael	Who is like God?	Meshach	Who is as Aku is?
Azariah	The Lord is my help	Abednego	Servant of Nebo (Nego)

Yet, even after their names were changed, Daniel will continue to call his friends by their Hebrew names in **1:11, 19** and **2:17**. When they were alone together, I’m sure they spoke in Hebrew with one another. So, there is this innate desire when you live in a foreign country to do those things that remind you of home.

And in a similar way, that’s what church is for. As citizens of heaven, we are living as aliens and exiles on earth. Therefore, how wonderful it is to gather as fellow citizens to hear about, talk about, and sing about, and remind each other of our home.

IV. The Bold Choice (vv. 8 – 16)

⁸But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

The word “defile” (Hebrew = *ga’ al*) means “to pollute” or “to stain” and is often used to denote religious defilement.

Some of the commentaries say that Daniel didn’t want to partake of the food because it wasn’t kosher. That is, Daniel’s red line had to do with whether “the king’s food” was “clean” by Jewish standards and “properly prepared” in accordance with the Mosaic Law.

However, it was perfectly OK for a Jew to drink “wine” (if they didn’t overdo it). Therefore, that doesn’t appear to be the reason.

Others suggest that Daniel’s reason for not wanting to partake of “the king’s food” and “wine” was because it had first been offered to the idols of Babylon. However, in **verse 12**, he agreed to eat the “vegetables.” But what would guarantee that the “vegetables” hadn’t also been offered to the false god’s of Babylon? Therefore, that doesn’t seem to be the reason either (see also **Dan. 10:3**).

Iain Duguid says, “The key to understanding why the four young men abstained from the royal food and wine is noticing that instead they chose to eat only those things that grow naturally – grains and vegetables – and to drink only naturally occurring water (**1:12**). This suggests that the goal of this simple lifestyle was to be constantly reminded of their dependence upon their creator God for their food, not King Nebuchadnezzar. Dependence on Nebuchadnezzar’s rich food would have been defiling because it would have repeated in their own lives the sin of King Hezekiah that brought judgment upon God’s people in the first place (see **2 Kings 20:17**).”

⁹And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king.”

You wouldn’t think this man cared one iota about Daniel, but “**God gave** Daniel favor.” Even so, Ashpenaz said, “No!” If Daniel’s proposed diet didn’t work, Ashpenaz would get the starring role as the headless horseman in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”!

¹¹Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²“Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king’s food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see.”

Daniel could have reasoned, “Well, I tried. I guess eating the king’s food is God’s will for me.” Instead, Daniel tried a different route. He believed this was God’s will for him. Therefore, he acted with humility and grace before his captors. He was patient and polite. And Daniel was granted his request.

¹⁴So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s food. ¹⁶So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

This was an answer to a prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the new temple in **1 Kings 8:50** (roughly 400 years prior).

Normally, if you eat only “vegetables” to get skinnier. However, Daniel and his friends grew “**fatter**” in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s food.”

V. The Best Candidates (vv. 17 – 21)

¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹And the king spoke with them, and among all of them

none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar had taken four teenagers' captive and taught them his ways and fed them his food. And they turned out to be far superior to anyone else "in all his kingdom." However, Daniel and his friends **knew** their success was not owing to Nebuchadnezzar, but to God!

It doesn't matter where you live or under what circumstances you find yourself in. ***What matters is our faithfulness.***

²¹And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.