



THE PROPHECY OF DANIEL

Lesson Number 4



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, AND LEARNING STAND THE TEST

Dan 1:17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. ²⁰ And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm. ²¹ And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus. ^{KJV} (Daniel 1:17-21)

INTRODUCTION

The stage has been set for God to be glorified in those with faith. A clash has been found between the requirements of the king, and Daniel's commitment to the Living God. The revealed sequence of events is instructive, and we do well to give heed to them. They reveal a spiritual framework within which God works within His people. This is not intended to

be the exclusive means through which the Lord works. It does, however, provide a sort of index as to how He works among and within His people.

☐ **Continued in the Faith.** Faith in and commitment to God were maintained under adverse circumstances.

- ☐ **Integrity maintained.** Comely qualities were not allowed to dim.
- ☐ **Humility.** There was submission to the scrutiny of others.
- ☐ **Determination.** Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself.

OUTLINE

- < FOUR GIFTED CHILDREN (1:17a)
- < ONE WHO EXCELLED (1:17b)
- < BROUGHT BEFORE NEBUCHADNEZZAR (1:18)
- < THE KING COMMUNES WITH THEM (1:19a)
- < THE GIFTED ARE PERCEIVED (1:19b)
- < TEN TIMES BETTER (1:20)
- < DANIEL CONTINUES (1:21)

- ▶ **Petition.** An initial request was made that he be permitted not to defile himself.
- ▶ **Tenacity.** Having been rejected by the “*prince of the eunuchs*,” Daniel takes up the matter with the subordinate who was over him.
- ▶ **Wisdom.** Daniel presents a proposal that will allow the superiority of faith to be seen.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, or even a mere routine that is guaranteed to bring results. It does, however, confirm that **Divine Sovereignty does not eliminate human involvement.** Many a confused soul has imagined God has abandoned them because nothing seems to be working out for them. They imagine that true faith sees resolutions instantly, and sets out to change circumstances with ease. They do not comprehend that faith has reasoning and purposing abilities, often moving the individual to efforts that require much wisdom. **Attitudes like this are fostered by the notion that God reacts instantly and conveniently to those who have great faith.** However, this is not a fair assessment of the facts.

THE EXPERIENCE OF ABRAHAM

Abraham patiently waited for the fulfillment of God’s promise for over twenty-five years. But in the end, his faith endured it all.

- ▶ The original calling of Abraham, and the promise that the world would be blessed through him. At that time, Abraham (then Abram) was seventy-five years old (Gen 12:1-4).
- ▶ Several years later, Abraham thought Eliezer, the steward of his house, was intended to be the heir (Gen 15:2).
- ▶ Shortly after this, he then consented to Sarah’s suggestion that the promised offspring could come through her handmaid, Hagar. When Ishmael was born, Abraham was eighty-six years old. Eleven years had passed since the original promise (Gen 16:1-3,16).
- ▶ Some time after the birth of Ishmael, and for the very first time, God revealed the promised offspring would come through Sarah (Gen 17:15-16).
- ▶ At that time Abraham fell on his face before the Lord, saying “*O that Ishmael might live before thee!*” (Gen 17:18).
- ▶ A short time later, God again appeared to Abraham, specifying the exact time Sarah would give birth to Isaac. About this time, Abraham was ninety-nine years old. Twenty-four years had passed since the promise (Gen 17:21,24).
- ▶ A short time after this, the Lord again confirmed to Abraham that Sarah would have the son as He promised (Gen 18:10).
- ▶ One year later, at the precise time promised, Sarah “*bare Abraham a son.*” At that time, he as one hundred years old, and twenty-five years had

passed since the promise (Gen 21:2).

SOME NEVER SAW FULFILLMENTS

Although it may appear as though Abraham waited for a long time, he was actually among the very few who saw the promises of God fulfilled. Many saints lived their whole lives in anticipation of something they never fully realized.

- ▶ Even in his own case, Abraham never did possess the land that God promised him, nor did Isaac or Jacob. All three of them journeyed in the land of promise “*as in a strange country*” (Heb 11:9). Commenting on this circumstance Stephen said, “*And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child*” (Acts 7:5).
- ▶ What about Adam and Eve? The promise was made that “*the Seed*” of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). Eve thought her first-born son was the seed (Gen 4:1). The promised “*Seed*,” however, did not come until four thousand years later.
- ▶ Moses told the people the Lord was going to raise up a Prophet like himself. To Him, the people would hearken (Deut 18:15). The Prophet did not come until about 1,500 years later.
- ▶ Isaiah declared a Son was going to be given to the people, and the government would be upon His shoulders (Isa 9:6-7). The promise was fulfilled over 700 years later.

THE POINT OF THIS

In these few examples, I am attempting to show why Daniel proceeded with patience. **It is the nature of God**

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to test faith, and it is the nature of faith to survive those tests. Salvation in any of its aspects is not accomplished in a moral vacuum. A moral vacuum is a setting where the individual is not

in serious jeopardy.

God has not given people any reason to believe such things. With unwavering consistency, He has given us

testing. **He accomplishes His will in an arena where the fabric of faith is tested, and the determination and stamina of His people are not taken for granted.** Whether it is Moses in the desert, Israel in the wilderness, or the early church in persecution, this manner can be seen. The greater the work, the greater the testing and opposition that is endured. We have Paul as an exceptional example in this *“day of salvation.”* Ponder the many obstacles that were thrown before him. They included stripes, imprisonment, repeated subjection to death, beatings, shipwrecks, perils, weariness, painfulness, going without sleep, hunger, thirst, fastings, and nakedness (2 Cor 11:23-27). As if that was not enough, he also endured afflictions, necessities, distresses, tumults, dishonor, evil reports, and sorrow (2 Cor 6:3-10). **The greater the work, the greater the suffering!** That principle reached its peak in the Lord Jesus Himself.

With this in mind, a refreshing view of trials can be seen. **They are actually an appointed means for preparing the saints for “greater works.”** Further, they are common to all who are living by faith.

FAITH IS EQUAL TO THE CHALLENGE

In all of these things, faith is equal to the challenge. It moves people to wait, but not to be idle. It constrains them to trust, but also to be perceptive and wise. Faith enables the individual to overcome discouragement, and to sense when it is appropriate to do something. All of these things, and more, are seen in the first testing of the four children of Judah. The text before us will confirm these things.

IT IS GOD’S MANNER TO WORK WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES AND TESTING. HE ACCOMPLISHES HIS WILL IN AN ARENA WHERE THE FABRIC OF FAITH IS TESTED, AND THE DETERMINATION AND STAMINA OF HIS PEOPLE ARE NOT TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

challenged, and choices are not required. It is a realm where good and evil are not locked in mortal combat.

It should not surprise us that a considerable number of professed believers approach salvation as though it was an automatic procedure, initiated in heaven, and carried out upon earth with relatively little or no involvement on the part of those being saved. Some have adopted this view officially, putting it in a creedal form, and vigorously teaching it to their constituents. Others do not teach this is the case, but live as though it was. They rely upon some point in time when they made a profession of faith, or, perhaps, feel safe in belonging to, what they conceive to be, the correct church. However, whether formally or informally, those who conduct their lives as though God is going to do everything for them are

a record of those who were blessed by Him. Without exception, they were involved in the process. Sometimes they were given things to do, like the instructions given to Israel when they were delivered from Egypt. Other times, as in our text, they had to *“work out”* their own salvation *“with fear and trembling,”* relying upon the Lord to give them wisdom on a step-by-step basis.

As we consider Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, we must carefully avoid viewing them as heroes, or some form of super men. These children were living by faith, and faith moves people to live the way they did.

GOD WORKS IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGE AND TESTING

It is God’s manner to work with His people in the midst of challenges and

FOUR GIFTED CHILDREN

“As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom . . .” The Holy Spirit has provided us with information concerning the surroundings and the circumstances relating to the four children of Judah. A brief review will suffice to set the stage for the exposition of this text.

- ▣ The Babylonian captivity is the setting.
- ▣ The part of it in which the four children of Judah were taken captive occurred in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.
- ▣ God gave Jehoiakim into the hands of

Nebuchadnezzar.

- ▣ Part of the vessels of the house of God were taken and placed in Shinar in the house of Nebuchadnezzar’s god.
- ▣ Nebuchadnezzar requires Ashpenaz, the prince of the eunuchs, to select certain of the children of Israel, from

princely backgrounds, for special training to stand in the king's court.

- ▶ The children had to be without blemish, comely in appearance, skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace.
- ▶ These children would be taught the language and literature of the Babylonians.
- ▶ New names are given to the four children of Judah.
- ▶ A special daily diet was appointed to them of the king's food and wine.
- ▶ Daniel determines not to defile himself with the dainties of the king's court.
- ▶ God brings Daniel into special favor with the prince of the eunuchs.
- ▶ Daniel asks permission not to defile himself with the food of the appointed diet.
- ▶ The prince of the eunuch's denies Daniel's appeal.
- ▶ Daniel takes up the matter with Melzar, a subordinate of Ashpenaz, who has been appointed over the boys.
- ▶ A test is proposed during which the four children will be fed only pulse and water.
- ▶ At the conclusion of the test, the appearance of the boys is superior to that of the other children to be trained for the king's court.
- ▶ A permanent diet of pulse and water is established for the boys, and none of the king's special diet is ever again set before them.

I want to again emphasize that God is integral to all of these circumstances. In them He is working all things together for the good of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. None of them are happenstance or random occurrences.

To this point in Daniel several significant details have been mentioned. Of themselves, there are not significant. Yet, God will weave them together into a tapestry that will be suitable for learning and confidence.

- ▶ **Eight particular people have been mentioned thusfar:** Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim, Ashpenaz, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Melzar.
- ▶ **Five groups of people** have been mentioned: the eunuchs, the children of Israel, the king's seed, princes, and the Chaldeans.
- ▶ **Six significant places have been mentioned:** Babylon, Jerusalem, the house of God, the house of Nebuchadnezzar's god, the treasure

our God here, and we do well to see it. Life is comprised of a variety of circumstances. Differing personalities are brought to bear upon each one of us, as well as a assortment of places and things. Yet, God, using all of these, is working things together for our ultimate good (Rom 8:28). He is doing it in your case, just as surely as He is in the case of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. **You may be in oppression like the four children of Judah, but God is not aloof from you, and you are not on your own!**

THESE FOUR CHILDREN

The focus of attention is now shifted from circumstances to people – to four particular people. They are not mighty kings like Nebuchadnezzar. They are not prominent in the king's employees like Ashpenaz and Melzar. He will not

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house of Nebuchadnezzar's god, and the king's palace.

- ▶ **Five particular items have been mentioned:** the vessels of the house of God, the king's meat, the wine that he drank, pulse, and water.

Now the Spirit will fasten our attention upon the ones for whose good He is working. Although he is a king, Nebuchadnezzar is not the point of Divine working. Although high ranking stewards, Ashpenaz and Melzar are not the focus of Divine intention. Even though it is one of the wonders of the world, the city of Babylon is worthy of Divine manipulation. There are a number of the children of Israel who are in captivity, but the eyes of the Lord will fasten upon certain ones of them.

A DIVINE MANNER

We are learning something about

speaking of people in general, like all of the children that were taken captive, or all of the servants of the king's court. He will center upon particular people, and they will even be children.

This is an aspect of God's dealings with humanity that brings great comfort to the afflicted. It is seen throughout the Word of God – namely, **that God calls and works with particular people.** I understand that all of His workings are not after this manner. There are times when he deals with a whole world, whether for cursing (as in the flood), or in blessing (as in His promise to Abraham). He can bless or curse nations, like Egypt, Israel, Assyria, and Babylon. He can deal with whole cities, as with Sodom, Jerusalem, and even Samaria. However, our God is not limited to general dealings, and we do well to free ourselves from thinking that tends in that direction. He also deals with individuals.

Special Dealings

The Scriptures are filled with God's dealings with special individuals. In a special way, such dealings began with Abraham. They continued with Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. The holy Prophets were such people, as well as John the Baptist and the Apostles. Other significant and especially blessed individuals include Luke, James, Jude, Stephen, Philip, Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and Titus. In each of these cases special calls and special workings were granted. In each of them, individuals rose above their peers, and were separated from the masses.

In not a few cases, the Lord called people out of especially dry and oppressive circumstances. Abraham was called out of idolatry. Joseph was separated from oppressive

who were just like them. He causes them to excel in an oppressive environment.

I want to urge you to make an association of these children with yourself and where you are. Let this text speak to you about possibilities – Divine possibilities. As hopeless and oppressive as your circumstances and surroundings may seem, you can rise above them through the blessing of the Lord. In fact, Scripture suggests that God is inclined to powerfully work in such situations. You have good reason to hope!

GOD GAVE THEM

"God gave them . . ." Where there is a trusting heart, circumstance cannot stop the blessing of the Lord. **When God gives, nothing can thwart the gift from becoming available and accessible.** Whether we are speaking of

He will do it even though they are young. He will do it even though they are not in the promised land. He will do it even though they are living in a period of Divine chastening.

Knowledge

"God gave them knowledge . . ."
One version reads, *"God gave them learning."*^{RSV} Nearly all other versions read *"knowledge."* Here, the word *"knowledge"* refers to intelligence, or consciousness. It refers to "thought," or the ability to think soundly and within the bounds of reason. **Their minds were gifted, and capable taking hold of facts and declarations and reasoning upon them.** By this, the text means the four boys grasped what they read, saw the sense of it, and were able to incorporate it into their thinking.

There are people who are very adept at thinking. They are able to see the interrelationships of facts, seeing the logic of them. This is a gift that comes from God, and must be so recognized.

You may recall that *"knowledge"* is one of the things Solomon asked of the Lord. *"Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?"* (2 Chron 1:10). In answer to his prayer, the Lord replied *"Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honor, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like"* (2 Chron 1:12). Later, Solomon would declare that God gives *"wisdom and knowledge"* to those who are *"good in His sight"* (Eccl 2:26). Ordinarily, people associate Solomon with wisdom alone, but he had *"knowledge"* also, which is comprised of the building blocks for wisdom.

Some Examples

"Knowledge" has to do with the pillars of logic – facts and realities upon which the mind can reason. There are whole bodies of reality that can be known, or concerning which *"knowledge"* can be possessed.

- ☐ *"The knowledge of salvation"* (Lk 1:77),
- ☐ *"The knowledge of the glory of God"*

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brothers. Moses was called from the desert of isolation. David was called from the sheepcotes, and when the kingdom was deteriorating. The Prophets were called when the worship of God was declining, and the people were drifting into idolatry. John the Baptist surfaced in times that were spiritually dark and dry, during which no powerful voice from God was being heard.

Circumstances are no hindrance to God! They are merely the tools He uses to shape His people and fulfill His purpose. That is the resounding message that comes through in this passage, and we must not fail to see it.

The Spirit will now show us how God worked with four young boys. He does so when they are captives. He blesses them in the land of the enemy. He directs and empowers them while they are under the scrutiny of a heathen king, away from their homeland and separated from their parents. He gives them more than others

the gift of God's Son (John 3:16), special gifts given by Jesus to the church (Eph 4:8), particular endowments to His people (Eph 1:17), or differing gifts according to His grace (Rom 12:6), **enemies and circumstance are powerless to stop them.** If men can believe, what God gives can **always** be received, regardless of the circumstances or surroundings.

Think where they were when God gave them these marvelous gifts to *"these four children."* It is not possible for a context to be more discouraging and seemingly hopeless. The judgment of God had fallen. The people of God are being chastened. The holy city has been devastated. The holy vessels have been removed to the house of a heathen god. The children have been selected to serve in a heathen court. **According to the flesh, their surroundings are not conducive to Divine gifts.** They are not in a holy place, under godly teachers, or with considerate parents. Yet, God will bless them, and in a most unusual way!

- (2 Cor 4:6).
- ▶ “The knowledge of God” (2 Pe 1:2)
- ▶ “The knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3 :7).
- ▶ “The knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph 4:15).
- ▶ “The knowledge of His will” (Col 1:9).
- ▶ “The knowledge” of God’s “ways” (Job 21:14).
- ▶ “The knowledge between good and evil” (Deut 1:39).
- ▶ “The knowledge of the holy” things (Prov 30:3).

Again, I want to emphasize the nature of this “knowledge.” **This is not the mere recollection of facts, but has to do with perceiving the sense of them, and being able to think properly concerning them.** The gift of knowledge, therefore, has more to do with comprehending than recalling, and thinking than reciting.

These four children were given the ability to think and reason that was displayed in Jesus when He was twelve years of age. It is said of the Lord Jesus at that time, that He was sitting among the experts of the Law, “both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Lk 2:46). His knowledge included being able to grasp what the teachers were saying, to answer their questions appropriately, and to ask questions that displayed His comprehension of what was being said. Thus, “all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Lk 2:47).

This is the kind of “knowledge” the Lord gave Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were able to take hold of what they were taught, and handle it with sound thought and application.

For The Believer

It is good for those in Christ to seek such knowledge for their children, not relying upon the world to give it to them. But it is particularly appropriate for them to seek the knowledge of God – a consciousness of Him that pervades their whole thinking process. This is precisely what Paul prayed for the church. “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in **the knowledge of Him**” (Eph 1:17). That, of course, is the highest form of knowledge.

Skill in All Learning

“God gave them . . . skill in all learning . . .” Other versions read, “skill in all literature,” ^{NKJV} “intelligence in every branch of literature,” ^{NASB} “understanding of all kinds of literature,” ^{NIV} and “skill in every aspect of literature.” ^{NRSV} In contemporary education, branches of literature would include language, history, biology, geography, botany, and the likes. It is most remarkable to have skill in a wide variety of these things, but God can grant such aptitude.

Ordinarily, men think in terms of having a speciality. It is not uncommon to find those particularly knowledgeable in one area, to be nearly bereft of all sense in

Academically, multitudes of Jews knew Moses and the Prophets as well as Paul. But they did not have skill in the use of them. They could not see Jesus in their words, and thus they used the very texts Paul used to bind burdens upon men and deny that Jesus was the Christ. They did not have “skill in all learning.” Paul did, because he received it from God.

Skill in All Wisdom

“God gave them . . . “all wisdom.”

Wisdom has to do with the administration, or proper employment, of knowledge. It is possible, for example, to use knowledge in the wrong manner. Thus a person can become a shrewd and crafty thief, a

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other areas. This is not the kind of learning skills God granted to the four children of Judah. It is not that they understood the Law of Moses, but were utterly ignorant in all other areas. In their thoughts, they could walk about in all fields of valid knowledge, perceiving the sense of it, and using it properly, and to advantage. Such an ability is truly extraordinary! **There is nothing in Scripture that leads us to believe God no longer grants such skill in learning.**

An Example

A example of skill in all learning is Paul’s use of Moses and the Prophets. Although a wide variety of teaching and declarations are found in this portion of Scripture, Paul was able to extract Christ from it all. He said, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which **the prophets and Moses did say should come**” (Acts 26:22).

manufacturer of drugs, or a compiler of pornography. Such people use their knowledge in unlawful and harmful ways. To have “skill in all wisdom,” is to be able to properly employ a wide variety of knowledge for the glory of God and the benefit of man.

God is still in the business of giving “skill in all wisdom” – the ability to properly employ all manner of valid knowledge. Paul refers to this as “the spirit of wisdom,” and prays that God will give it to believers. “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you **the spirit of wisdom** . . .” (Eph 1:17). He elaborates on this matter in his Epistle to the Colossians, showing the relationship of this wisdom to the knowledge that comes from God. “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will **in all wisdom and spiritual understanding**” (Col 1:9). Notice, he prays for our filling!

The purpose of such wisdom is also stated. *“That ye **might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”*** (Col 1:10-12). You can see the marvelous effects of *“all wisdom,”* and they are available to all who are in Christ Jesus!

- ▣ It effects the fabric of our life, enabling us to walk worthy of God, so that we are not an embarrassment to

- ▣ It promotes thankfulness.

It should be apparent that becoming skillful in all wisdom yields unusual and plentiful benefits. This is the kind of skill that God gave these four young men. The effects of it will be chronicled in the rest of the book. **Their unwavering and faithful conduct reveals HOW they used their remarkable knowledge and wisdom.**

In my judgment, there is a great need for these gifts in the church of our time. In Christ, they are available in great measures for both old and young. The

produce icons among men. They do not place men upon pedestals to be beheld and honored by mortals. Rather, they are intended to make men collaborators with God – to bring them into the vortex of Divine purpose. **In order for them to be properly employed, those possessing them must be put to the test.** The dross must be taken from them in order that they may bring due honor to God and benefit to His people.

SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

These four children were exposed to all manner of Babylonian wisdom, language, and literature. This involved idolatry (3:3-7; 5:4), magicians and astrologers (1:20), sorcerers (2:2), and soothsayers (2:27). These areas of spiritual falsehood and corruption pervaded the whole of Babylonian literature and wisdom.

Yet these boys were given supernatural knowledge and wisdom that allowed them to remain uncontaminated by Babylon’s learning. **Not only were they able to employ true knowledge correctly, but they were also able to avoid areas of false knowledge and wisdom.**

This should be of especial comfort to believers in this day and time. Many of our children are being subjected to all manner of corrupt knowledge. The academic environment is not good. Some of this can be controlled by godly men and women. However, there may very well be some exposure that is beyond our control. In such times, we have the example of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, assuring us that Divine protection is still available. Our God is great enough to give knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom to our children! It is right to seek such things for them, and it will glorify the Lord when they are received..

IF, BEFORE CHRIST AND THIS GREAT SALVATION, GOD COULD GRANT THESE THINGS TO FOUR YOUNG CAPTIVES IN BABYLON, HOW MUCH MORE IS HE WILLING TO GRANT THEM TO THOSE WHO ARE IN HIS SON, RECONCILED TO HIM, AND POSSESSING HIS HOLY SPIRIT!

Him.

- ▣ It enables us to please the Lord in every way and at all times.
- ▣ We thus become fruitful in every good work.
- ▣ An increase in the knowledge of God is realized, so that we are more familiar with His ways and conscious of His presence.
- ▣ We are empowered to be patient, persevere, or endure.
- ▣ This wisdom enables us to persevere under difficult circumstances *“with joyfulness.”*

status of the modern church reveals an absence of these qualities, but such a condition does not need to continue. **If, before Christ and this great salvation, God could grant these things to four young captives in Babylon, how much more is He willing to grant them to those who are in His Son, reconciled to Him, and possessing His Holy Spirit!** Such things are to be sought by faith, and expected by hope. We are to be encouraged in these matters.

WHAT IS GIVEN MUST BE TESTED

Now we will see that those who receive gifts from God must be tested. Gifts from God are not intended to

ONE WHO EXCELLED

“^{17b} . . . and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” Other versions read, *“Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams,”* ^{NASB} *“And Daniel could*

understand visions and dreams of all kinds,” ^{NIV} *“Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams,”* ^{NRSV} and *“And God gave Daniel special ability in understanding the meanings of visions*

and dreams.” ^{NLT}

All four of the children received knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, but Daniel received more! He

excelled above the other three. It was not because he was personally better than the others, but because God gave him more than He did the others. That is God's manner. He does not treat everyone alike. Here were four young men who all had faith and were honorable. Yet, they did not all receive equal gifts from God.

RELEVANT TO HIS MINISTRY

Daniel excelled in an area that would prove unusually significant in God's dealings with men. He was given the ability to understand and interpret "all visions and dreams." Like the grace of God conferred upon Paul was "not in vain" (1 Cor 15:10), so the ability to understand "all visions and dreams" was not given in vain to Daniel.

- ▣ He told Nebuchadnezzar the dream he had forgotten (a small stone crushing a large image, grinding it to powder), then gave him the interpretation of it (2:1-45).
- ▣ He interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a tree whose height reached into heaven, and was cut down, leaving the stump and roots (4:4-26).
- ▣ He recorded a dream he himself had of four beasts coming out of the sea (7:1-14). A heavenly personage enabled him to understand the dream (7:15-27).
- ▣ He interpreted a message written by a man's hand upon the wall of the palace of king Belshazzar (5:5-28).
- ▣ He was given to understand a vision of a ram and a he goat, and powers springing from the he goat, which strove with one another (8:1-10:21).

GIFTS MUST BE USED

The gifts God gives must be stirred up (2 Tim 1:6), and not neglected (1 Tim 4:14). Those who receive them are to be good stewards of them, employing them for the glory of God and the benefit of those to whom they are given to minister (1 Pet 4:10).

GOD ALONE GIVES SUCH GIFTS

Such gifts cannot be taught by men. They involve skill that cannot be acquired naturally. The understanding and interpreting of dreams, for example,

is not a science, as ordinarily understood. Who could conceive of a college course on understanding **all** visions and dreams?

What is more, not even every one in favor with God receives such abilities. In our text, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had all manner of knowledge and wisdom, but they did **not** have the ability to understand all visions and dreams. In this matter Daniel excelled above even them.

Speaking of this very principle, Paul referred to various spiritual gifts in this way. "For who **maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?**" (1 Cor 4:7).

Throughout the Scriptures, there are examples of those who excelled. Daniel is certainly not the only one. He excelled other Jewish children who were captives, and even the three choice lads with whom he was more closely affiliated.

- ▣ Abraham excelled both his brothers and his father (Gen 11:24-12:1)
- ▣ Joseph excelled his brothers (Gen 45:7).
- ▣ Moses excelled Aaron and Miriam, his brother and sister (Num 12:5-8).
- ▣ Solomon excelled not only kindred Israelites, but "all the children of the

SUCH GIFTS CANNOT BE TAUGHT BY MEN. THEY INVOLVE SKILL THAT CANNOT BE ACQUIRED NATURALLY. THE UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING OF DREAMS, FOR EXAMPLE, IS NOT A SCIENCE, AS ORDINARILY UNDERSTOOD. WHO COULD CONCEIVE OF A COLLEGE COURSE ON UNDERSTANDING ALL VISIONS AND DREAMS?

If there are legitimate difference among us, it is God who has caused it. Particularly as regards the body of Christ, "there are **diversities** of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are **differences** of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are **diversities** of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Cor 12:4-6).

The gifts and abilities God grants are different, but they are harmonious and complementary. There is a certain spiritual synergy in them that enables one person to sharpen and strengthen the other. This a most wonderful quality of spiritual life, and is imperative for the growth of the body..

ON THE MATTER OF EXCELLING

The fact that one can excel his peers is not only strange to some brethren, it is even abrasive. But this response is not at all necessary.

east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:30).

- ▣ David excelled his brothers (1 Sam 16:13).
- ▣ Peter, James, and John excelled above the other Apostles (Matt 17:1; Mark 5:37; Mark 14:33).
- ▣ John excelled above Peter and James (John 19:26).
- ▣ Paul excelled above the twelve Apostles (1 Cor 15:10).
- ▣ Timothy excelled among others who labored with Paul (Phil 2:19-20).
- ▣ The churches in Macedonia excelled other churches in the matter of giving (2 Cor 8:1-3; 9:2).

The fact that one can excel others in the Kingdom is not intended to create

jealousy, friction, or despair. Rather, it will, when properly seen, spawn humility, thankfulness, and hope. Spiritual gifts

yield spiritual results. **For those who are living in the midst of spiritual famine, or who are surrounded with**

the blight of mediocrity, there is no need to despair. God can cause you to excel, like Daniel.

BROUGHT BEFORE NEBUCHADNEZZAR

“¹⁸ Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.” Suddenly, our text leaps forward three years. Everything occurring during those three years was really incidental, even though considerable difficulties, sorrows, and trials may have been experienced by the four children. There is no reason to believe things were monotonous during that time, or that there were not times of especial joy. Nor, indeed, is it essential to think nothing unusually difficult was experienced. I find it exceedingly difficult

life as though they were nothing. It is HOW we view these things that is critical.

It is possible to be so elated that we forget what is really happening around and within us. An example of this is found in one of Christ’s post-resurrection appearances to His disciples. The occasion is when Cleopas and his companion hastened to the disciples to tell them Jesus was risen, and they had been with Him (Lk 24:33-34). While they were speaking, *“Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”* The disciples were frightened, thinking they had seen a

direction. Such an occasion is found in the life of Jacob. For years, he had thought Joseph was dead. Now his other sons had gone to Egypt for bread, and returned without Simeon. In addition, he is told that the ruler of Egypt, who was actually Joseph, had requested they bring Benjamin back with them to Egypt. It was more than Jacob could bear. He cried out, *“all these things are against me”* (Gen 42:36). His assessment, however, was premature.

Thus, there are important things to be seen in the way in which the lives of these boys are made known to us. The details of life that did not obviously connect with Divine purpose are simply omitted. The Spirit runs forward to the conclusion of the appointed three year period during which the boys were being prepared to come before the king. **The saints during the years that follow will not be profited by the grinding detail of those three years. They will, however, be greatly encouraged by the outcome of that preparatory period.**

There is principle to be seen here. **We cannot live simply for the moment. There is a time of reckoning and examination, and we must think in terms of being ready for that time.**

THE END OF THE DAYS

The word *“days”* means period of time. That time was specified in verse five: *“They were to be **trained for three years**, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.”*^{NIV} During that time, the diet of pulse and water continued to nourish and develop their bodies. Their knowledge and wisdom continued to advance and be honed to perfection. They were not forsaken, but were upheld by God **in Babylon**. Their faith was kept in tact. Their morals did not decline. They were, in fact, *“kept by the power of God*

IN THE DIVINE ECONOMY, PURPOSE IS THE POINT, NOT EXPERIENCE! FAITH MOVES PEOPLE TO CONSIDER MILESTONES ABOVE THE DETAILS OF LIFE, AND DIVINE APPOINTMENTS ABOVE DAILY CIRCUMSTANCES.

to believe that three years could pass without any unusual sorrows and joys occurring, or during which there were no times of trial or triumph.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

There is a certain kingdom mindset revealed here, and we do well to take it in. **In the Divine economy, purpose is the point, not experience! Faith moves people to consider milestones above the details of life, and Divine appointments above daily circumstances.** I do not for one moment suggest there is anything easy or simplistic about this. Nor, indeed, am I dispensing with the hardships or joys of

spirit. Jesus assured them it was really Him, asking them to behold and handle Him, seeing he had flesh and bones just like them. He then *“showed them his hands and his feet.”* The occasion was so significant that joy welled up in their hearts. **However, this joy was the kind that inhibited faith – not the kind springing from faith.** It is written, *“they yet believed not for joy”* (Lk 24:40). I fear many a soul has experienced just such a thing. I do not doubt that such occasions arose during the three years of our text.

It is also possible to access our circumstances as being totally against us, thus becoming unaware of Divine

through faith," just as we are (1 Pet 1:5).

A MINIATURE PICTURE

It is not coincidence that the incident before us is a miniature picture of the destiny of all men. Scripture is always within the context of Divine purpose, and is never written in isolation of "the end of all things" (1 Pet 4:7). While it is possible to fabricate such pictures, the one before us is very obvious. It is genuine, reflecting genuine values, and bruising genuine encouragements. We

cannot leave this section, therefore, without drawing attention to it.

Ultimately, all men will be called before "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15). That will also be a time of examination and testing. Paul refers to it as a time when "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor 3:13). Just as with the four children of Judah, the outcome will be whether or not we are able to remain in the king's court, or be

"ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). Until that time, we have the opportunity to learn the wisdom of our real homeland, and become oriented to its manners.

We must be about ingesting the proper diet of the kingdom, which is "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of god" (Matt 4:4). Nothing must be allowed that defiles heart or mind. Blessed is the individual who knows these things, and applies himself to fulfilling them!

THE KING COMMUNED WITH THEM

"^{19a} And the king communed with them . . ." There is a certain sense of intimidation in these words. This was not a casual conversation, as friend with friend. The lads were now talking to the ruler of the world. This is the king into whose hands Judah had been delivered (Jer 21:7; 22:25). God had given "all nations" into his hand, even declaring "and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him" (Jer 27:7). The great nation of Egypt was smitten by him (Jer 46:19), and given to him by God as wages for his army (Ezek 29:19). According to Divine determination, Tyre had been devastated by him (Ezek 29:18). Among the captives he garnered were Phoenicians, Syrians, Egyptians, and Jews. Earthly historians allege that Nebuchadnezzar conquered much of Africa and Spain, marching on through Spain to Greece and Pontus.

Not only did God give worldly kingdoms to Nebuchadnezzar, and use him to chasten His own people. He also gave him "power, and strength, and glory" (Dan 2:37). Through inspiration, Daniel told this king that he was the most illustrious of all kings, and his kingdom was the most glorious of all earthly kingdoms. "And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath He given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. **Thou art this head of gold**" (Dan 2:38). After him, global kingdoms began to deteriorate. His kingdom was like gold. The following global kingdoms were likened to silver,

then brass, then iron, then a mixture of iron and clay (Dan 2:32-33).

Suffice it to say, this was no ordinary man! And now, "these four children," stand before him. They are there to be examined, after which a determination concerning their future will be made.

"And the king communed with them." Other versions read, "the king interviewed them," ^{NKJV} "the king talked with them," ^{NASB} "the king spoke with them," ^{NRSV} and "The king conversed with them." ^{NJB} This was not a lecture, it was a two-way conversation. Questions were asked, and interrogation was made. No doubt he scrutinized them on the

framework of a broad range of subjects.

Nebuchadnezzar had spared no expense in the training of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and he would therefore be most thorough in his examination of them. If the aim is to determine whether or not they will remain as advisors in his court, he must be favorably impressed with them. Their appearance and demeanor must not be distracting. They must be thoroughly conversant with the language and manner of the Babylonians so they can advise him.

There is, however, a higher purpose that is being served here. **This book is about God's glory, and how He causes it to be seen. It was not**

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT GOD'S GLORY, AND HOW HE CAUSES IT TO BE SEEN. IT WAS NOT THE AGENDA OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR THAT WAS DRIVING THIS SERIES OF EVENTS, BUT THE PURPOSE OF ALMIGHTY GOD.

principal areas of their study, examining them to see if they had knowledge and knew how to use it. He no doubt tested them in their understanding and use of the language of Babylon, which they were to have learned (1:4). He would test the scope of their knowledge, and whether they were able to reason within the

the agenda of Nebuchadnezzar that was driving this series of events, but the purpose of Almighty God. There would be generations of believers that would be taught about the character and purpose of God through the record of these events. We ourselves are among those generations. Thus, these events are

being orchestrated by God for that generation *“upon whom the ends of the world are come”* (1 Cor 10:11). That, and that alone, is precisely why this account ministers to our spirits.

AN OBSERVATION

The adequacy of faith must be seen in these verses. Ponder the effect that testing had upon you when you were in school. Or, if you are a student, consider how you feel on the eve of a final exam. What if your future depended on that test? Every student is aware of the impact of such considerations upon the

mind and the emotions.

Now, ponder these four boys – away from home, in a foreign land, and, according to appearance, at the mercy of a heathen monarch. The text will confirm that these boys did not buckle under the pressure. Their answers were precise and thorough, and they gave no cause to imagine they were unqualified, or unable to stand in the king’s court.

What is it that made these boys so able? How is it that they were not unduly intimidated by one of the greatest and

most influential kings in history? It was their faith that prepared and kept them. **To be more precise, God kept and enabled them through their faith.** This is how the Lord works, whether in the young or the old, the novice or the elder.

If a person can find it in his heart to trust the Lord, relying upon Him, and remaining devoted to Him, he will be kept in the time of testing. God keeps His people by His power and through their faith. That is the message you must obtain from this account!

THE GIFTED ARE PERCEIVED

^{19b} **“ . . . and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.”** The time has come when the

interrogated by the king, but it must have been a significant number: *“them all.”*

An Application

It is true that each of us will be

difference how we will be judged. The advantages that were available to us will also come into play. The four children of Judah were evaluated in view of what they had been taught, how well they assimilated and applied the knowledge, and how they compared with others who had similar advantages – *“among them all.”*

I cannot leave this section without drawing attention to the time when we will all *“stand before God,”* and the *“books”* will be opened (Rev 20:12). **We will be judged as individuals, but not in isolation of the rest of humanity.** There is a sense in which we will be compared with others. Jesus unveiled this coming comparison.

THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD A MESSAGE THAT SHOULD HAVE INDUCED FAITH AND REPENTANCE WILL BE COMPARED WITH NINEVEH.

effects of faith will be put to the test. The four children of Judah have chosen to prepare for this time in a way that was unconventional for the Babylonians. **They chose to be different.** They elected to honor the Lord above the king. In honor to their Lord, they opted to refuse the established diet, and be fed with the food of peasants. Will their choice be justified? Will the Lord be honored or reproached by their decision?

AMONG THEM ALL

“Among them all . . . ” Other versions read *“out of them all,”* ^{NASB} Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are not the only boys being examined. We do not know how many young men were

judged as individuals. *“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Rom 14:12). It is also true that we are not to compare ourselves with our peers. As it is written, *“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise”* (2 Cor 10:12). However, we must not take a simplistic view of how we will appear before God when compared with others.

There is a public stance that will also be taken by each one of us.

What we have been given will make a

▣ **Generations that have been given access to great benefits will be compared with the queen of Sheba.** *“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here”* (Matt 12:42).

▣ **Those in whose presence the Lord has worked will be compared with Tyre and Sidon.** *“Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you,*

they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you” (Luke 10:13-14).

- ▶ **Those who have heard a message that should have induced faith and repentance will be compared with Nineveh.** “The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Luke 11:32).

In Christ Jesus, we have been granted a “better covenant, which is established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6). That circumstance will necessitate some comparison between the church and Israel. Is there anyone who thinks God will overlook those who have done no better under grace than Israel did under the Law? Will those who had a better covenant and better promises be expected to have attained no more than those deprived of such things?

Cities like Jerusalem, Samaria, and Thessalonica will surely be compared with other cities who heard the same message as they, yet did not respond as honorably as they did. And what of individuals like the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailor? Will they not be compared with other individuals who heard the same glorious Gospel as they, yet responded with less nobility and commitment?

I do not doubt that congregations with gifted people will be compared with the church at Antioch, who had many teachers and prophets among them, and excelled through their ministry (Acts 13:1).

These are not meaningless observations. The whole of Scripture has been written with the manner of God’s kingdom in mind. The examination of these four lads by Nebuchadnezzar should speak to us of our own imminent examination. **This is the way God works. It has to do with His ways. That is why the passage has been recorded for us.**

NONE LIKE THEM

“ . . . was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.” The superiority of these four became apparent within the context of “them all.” That is when their faith became most evident.

Some people appear quite impressive on their own, but when they are compared with others, they are no longer impressive. There are several such comparisons made in Scripture. They show us that no person stands by himself.

- ▶ When conversing with Satan, the Lord Himself said of Job, “*Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil*” (Job 1:8; 2:3).

Distinction In Commonality

Keep in mind, it was their faith, as made known in their determination, that

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- ▶ King Saul is described as a man “whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is **none like him among all the people**” (1 Sam 10:24).

- ▶ King Solomon was distinguished among all kings. Of him God said, “Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was **none like thee** before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee” (1 Kgs 3:12).

- ▶ Even on the side of evil, there are some who have excelled above other workers of iniquity, like Ahab. “But there was **none like unto Ahab**, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up” (1 Kgs 21:25).

- ▶ On the other hand, Hezekiah surpassed others in the matter of trusting the Lord. In this vital area, he excelled. “He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was **none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him**” (2 Kgs 18:5).

distinguished these young men from all of the others. In this case, “them all” were other Jewish boys who were also taken captive and trained to be ready for this very examination.

- ▶ All of them were of the children of Israel.
- ▶ All of them were from the tribe of Judah.
- ▶ All of them were from royal and princely seed.
- ▶ All of them were under Ashpenaz.
- ▶ All of them had excellent and superior qualities.
- ▶ All of them received the same training.

The Context of the Gifts

However, there is more to life than gifts and advantages. The distinction of these boys was fivefold. These things were the foundation for their excellence.

- ▶ **DETERMINATION.** “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the

portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank" (1:8a).

- ▶ **PETITION.** Daniel *"requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself"* (1:8b).
- ▶ **FAVOR.** *"God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs"* (1:9).
- ▶ **PRESENTATION.** Daniel had presented an alternative. *"Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink"* (1:12).
- ▶ **DIVINE ENDOWMENT.** *"God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (1:17).

Some Observations

You will observe that determination, or purpose of heart, preceded God working all things together for the good of the boys. That

are granted.

There is a remarkable level of loose thinking on these matters in the average congregation, and among individual believers. Much of the spiritual sterility of the modern church is owing to the lack of godly purpose and commitment. There simply is not a dominating quest to do the will of the Lord, remaining *"unspotted from the world"* (James 1:27). **However, even though these qualities are not common, they can still be possessed, just as surely as they were by Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in Babylon.**

THEREFORE

"... therefore stood they before the king." Other versions read, *"therefore they served before the king,"* ^{NKJV} *"so they entered the king's personal service,"* ^{NASB} and *"therefore they were stationed in the king's court."* ^{NRSV} By saying *"they stood,"* the text means they **regularly** were before the king, there to assist him as

God. He considered them from a political point of view.

Wisdom for Temporal Matters

God's people must be encouraged to consider this aspect of living for the Lord. **He can give extraordinary abilities in matters relating to temporal things.** We see this in the matter of constructing the tabernacle and those things related to it.

- ▶ **ARTISANS.** The Lord endowed certain artisans with the ability to *"make Aaron's garments"* (Ex 28:3).
- ▶ **BAZALEEL.** Bazaleel was given *"the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship,"* enabling him to *"to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship."* (Ex 31:4).

HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH THESE QUALITIES ARE NOT COMMON, THEY CAN STILL BE POSSESSED, JUST AS SURELY AS THEY WERE BY DANIEL, HANANIAH, MISHAEL, AND AZARIAH IN BABYLON.

- ▶ **AHOLIAB.** Aholiab receive wisdom to make *"the tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the tabernacle, and the table and his furniture, and the pure candlestick with all his furniture, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his furniture, and the laver and his foot, and the cloths of service, and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office, and the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy place: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do"* (Ex 31:7-11).

determination was also expressed in an orderly request to be relieved of the obligation of imbibing the king's diet. In honor of Daniel's faith, God caused Ashpenaz to seek the betterment of the boys. Although rejected at first, Daniel pursued his convictions and intention by purposing a test in which their desires would be justified. God then equipped them for the challenge before them.

Ordinarily, victories and spiritual successes are preceded by such determinations and Divine endowments. It is not right to expect the Lord to simply turn everything around for us when there are godly purposes **we** can possess and seek to implement. **Capabilities are not regularly given without the commitment of those to whom they**

advisors. They became his employees, and were now part of the royal court. Thus, the reason for their preparation was realized.

Blessing Does Not Make Inferior

There is something of particular importance here. In this case, and from one perspective, Divine aptitude was granted in order to the fulfillment of secular, or temporal, activities. Of course, more is involved than this. There would also be prophecies, interpretations, and other matters more obviously relating to the purpose of God. **Notwithstanding, their employment in Divine purpose did not make them inferior in earthly duties!** From Nebuchadnezzar's point of view, they were not standing before him because they were blessed by

- ▶ **BEZALEEL AND AHOIAB.** *"Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work"* (Ex 35:35).

- ▶ **SOLOMON.** The outcome of the wisdom God gave to Solomon was seen in expertise in temporal matters.

*“And he spake three thousand **proverbs**: and his **songs** were a thousand and five. And he spake of **trees**, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of **beasts**, and of **fowl**, and of **creeping things**, and of **fishes**”* (1 Kings 4:32-33).

There is a general assumption in the world that religion causes people to be inferior in both thought and aptitude. Lenin once affirmed that religion was “the opiate of the people,” casting them into social and political sleep. This general impression remains among unbelievers.

However, this is a wholly false impression. We see in Daniel and his colleagues that this is not the case. They stood tall before one of the most politically astute kings in the history of the world – one who was noted more for his social exploits than his military triumphs.

Let us thrust from us the notion that we must be mediocre in any area of life. We are to do all things, including “*word or deed*,” and eating and drinking, or “*whatsoever*” we do, unto the Lord (Col 3:17; 1 Cor 10:31). Our daily occupations are not excluded from this, any more than those of the four Hebrew children.

They Stood Before the King

Our text does not say they were the only ones who stood before Nebuchadnezzar. The stage, however, is being set for a declaration of the purpose and power of God. From this point on, it makes little difference who else stood before the king. **God was going to work with them for His own glory, and had so orchestrated the events that what they said and did would be duly observed.**

At this point, these four young men, probably around twenty years of age, become the most prominent people in Babylon. Every one else, whether Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, or Darius, are incidental. **Further, God is using young men whose abilities and integrity are unquestioned.** Years later, presidents and princes who would try and find a reason to condemn Daniel,

*“could find **none occasion nor fault**; forasmuch as he was faithful, **neither was there any error or fault found in him**”* (Dan 6:4). Considering the breadth and length of Daniel’s exposure to human analysis, this is a remarkable observation.

An Application

Whether you are young or old, the Lord can give you the wisdom and ability to stand the tests to which you are subjected! Whether you are standing in a king’s court, or keeping sheep on the back side of the desert, you can excel in what you do, if you seek to honor the Lord in it. **Nature cannot lock into mediocrity those who put their trust in God, and determine not to defile themselves!** There can be great satisfaction in your daily occupation, just as surely as there was in that of Daniel and his associates.

LESSONS

There are many lessons that can be learned from this text. **Remember, we are seeing the effects of faith and godly determination upon human aptitude and conduct.** If life seems to have dealt you something less

by an edict from the king. It was complicated by the rejection of his initial request. It was also tested by a period of ten days, after which positive results must be apparent. Daniel did not balk at these things, but held to his purpose, refusing to be moved from it. He and his colleagues therefore received strength to carry out their intentions.

Wisdom is justified of her children. Jesus once said, “*But wisdom is justified of all her children*” (Lk 7:35). Instead of “*justified*,” other versions read “*vindicated*,” ^{NASB} “*proved right*,” ^{NIV} “*judged to be right*,” ^{BBE} and “*shown to be right*.” ^{NLT} This saying is attended with some difficulty, yet contains a vigorous seed for our thoughts. **The idea is that truly wise people (“all her children”) will eventually perceive the value of right and holy things.** In the case of Luke’s text, both Jesus and John the Baptist had been criticized by the religious leaders of that time. John was ascetic, and Jesus mingled with the people. Neither one of them consented to the opinions of the people, or shaped their lives by their demands. Thus, both were criticized. Christ’s point was that those with discerning hearts would joyfully

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than ideal circumstances, let this text “*sink down into your ears*” (Lk 9:44). The seeds of encouragement are in it.

Decisions are not an end of themselves. Making godly decisions is a prelude, not a conclusion. It must be followed by shaping our lives to please the Lord. When we are confronted with challenges, temptations, and tests, we must seek the way of escape that comes with them (1 Cor 10:13). In our text, the determination of Daniel was challenged

and acknowledge both John and Jesus were sent by God, and had the message of God. Thus the benefits they brought would be realized.

In the case of the four children of Judah, truly discerning people can see in them the benefit of living by faith, and refusing to concede to the demands of the world. Their acceptance in the king’s court was directly owing to their faith in God, not their fleshly expertise – which they DID possess by the gift of God.

Faith stands up under worldly tests. Because of sectarianism, and the incessant efforts to maintain it, the value of faith has been greatly obscured. Some have come to view faith as a response in a procedure of several steps, each having equal value. Others see it as a sort of magical possession that has no direct connection with the purposes and intents of the heart. Still others look at faith as an exercise of the intellect. All of these views are adopted because they blend more handily with the theological positions that are being held.

God, however, has no interest in the maintenance of humanly devised systems of thought. Thus, the Scriptures,

How marvelously this is confirmed in Daniel and his friends. Although captives in Babylon and young children, in three years they rose to a place of prominence in the king's court. They did so without compromising their faith. They did so while maintaining their resolve not to defile themselves. And, they did so even though they were required to pass the personal scrutiny of the greatest political ruler in the world. **Faith does stand up under worldly tests, as well as those higher tests that come from the Lord.**

God honors those who honor Him. It is never vain to honor the Lord, shaping your life to please Him and honor

3:13). Those who said they could not possibly have been more wrong. In the first place, they had not been serving the Lord, but their own corrupt interests. Then, assigning validity to their defiled religious worship, they said it was all pointless.

Asaph writes how he once envied the foolish and the wicked. He saw them wallowing in prosperity and plenty, while his feet came close to stumbling, and he nearly lost his spiritual foothold. He cried out, *"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."* He could not possibly have been more wrong, and he finally saw that when he *"went into the sanctuary of God."* Then he saw that the wicked were not secure at all, but were on a slippery slope, leading to destruction (Psa 73:1-19).

Our text confirms that no person who honors God will be ignored by Him. Eventually, they will reap what they have sown in faith – even if they are captives in Babylon. Of the ultimate commitment Jesus said, *"If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor"* (John 12:26).

If you can see this whole event correctly, it was not Nebuchadnezzar that was favoring the diligence of the boys, but God who was honoring their faith and commitment to Him. He will surely have the same regard for your faith and determination to please Him.

OUR TEXT CONFIRMS THAT NO PERSON WHO HONORS GOD WILL BE IGNORED BY HIM. EVENTUALLY, THEY WILL REAP WHAT THEY HAVE SOWN IN FAITH – EVEN IF THEY ARE CAPTIVES IN BABYLON.

which are inspired by God (2 Tim 2:16), present faith in a way that blends only with Divine intent. **Faith is presented as, opening the door of impossibility.** In a sense, in which faith is invincible. *"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"* (Mk 9:23). Again, *"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you"* (Matt 17:20).

His Word. Of old time, people identified with God have reasoned that it was not profitable to serve Him, even though they had no just reason for doing so.

In Malachi's day, defiled hearts reasoned, *"It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?"* (Mal 3:14). God considered such words to be *"stout,"* or arrogant, against Him (Mal

TEN TIMES BETTER

"²⁰And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm." The Holy Spirit now extends Himself to give honor to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In this, He is revealing the aggressiveness with

which the Lord vindicates His people. The Lord not only provides for His own, directing and leading them, He also praises them. That is His manner. Jesus spoke of those who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. *"For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"* (John 12:43). He also spoke of those who cannot believe because

they *"seek not the honor that cometh from God only"* (John 5:44). Paul declared a day was coming when all who were aligned with the Lord would receive *"praise from God"* (1 Cor 4:5).

This is no small matter, nor is it a departure from our text! Zephaniah the prophet told the faithful. *"The LORD thy*

God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zeph 3:17). In our text, we find the Lord doing precisely what the Word declares He will do: praising the faithful and joying over them. This is His assessment of the boys, and not merely the observation of Nebuchadnezzar. There is no exaggeration in these words.

ALL MATTERS OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

" . . . in all matters of wisdom and understanding." Every major translation reads precisely the same: *"wisdom and understanding."* Some use the word *"prudence"* for *"understanding."*^{NAB}

This is an important observation. The boys were not tested to see if they remembered what they read – a practice that is common in academic circles. It is not that such things are not important. However, they do not qualify a person for responsibility. When people are tested in all matters of wisdom and understanding, they are being examined to see if they can USE the knowledge, employing it for useful purposes. It would be like giving a student of mathematics a complex problem to actually solve. Or, like assigning an engineering student some building or technical project that would prove he knew how to use the knowledge to which he was exposed.

There is a vast difference between knowing what tools are, being able to pick them up, and knowing how to profitably and constructively use them. It is possible to teach a young boy how to pick out a hammer, saw, and screwdriver. But it would be quite another matter to ask such a boy to build your house, or a shopping mall.

The idea here is that the boys were tested in all kinds of areas where **special** understanding was required. The examination was no doubt extensive (*"all matters"*), requiring several days to complete.

An Application

In my judgment, the modern church is sorely lacking in men who have their *"senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (Heb 5:14). This is the primary reason for the sudden rise in

religious counselors, while a simultaneous drop in ministers of the Word has taken place. Those who specialize in, what is called, "Christian education," should grant no credentials to their students until they can, to some helpful degree, work with the truth of God. If Nebuchadnezzar would not allow advisors in his worldly court who could not pass an examination in all areas requiring wisdom and understanding, why should the church of the living God do so? That criteria should also be bound upon elders, deacons, and teachers.

TEN TIMES BETTER

" . . . he found them ten times better . . . " All major translations of

asked his understudy, Elisha, what he desired, he said, *"let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."* Elijah acknowledged he had asked a *"hard thing."* Nevertheless, he did receive what he requested (2 Kgs 2:9-10).

- ▣ When Nathan gave David a parable about a man who stole his neighbors solitary lamb to serve a guest, David was incensed, and said the man should restore the lamb **"fourfold"** (2 Sam 12:6).
- ▣ When Jesus came to the house of Zaccheus, the tax collector said, *"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I*

IF NEBUCHADNEZZAR WOULD NOT ALLOW ADVISORS IN HIS WORLDLY COURT WHO COULD NOT PASS AN EXAMINATION IN ALL AREAS REQUIRING WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, WHY SHOULD THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD DO SO? THAT CRITERIA SHOULD ALSO BE BOUND UPON ELDERS, DEACONS, AND TEACHERS.

Scripture use the words, *"ten times better."* One reads, *"ten times superior."*
WEBSTER **This is not, then, a mere hyperbole, or literary exaggeration.**

The remarkable extent of the superiority of these four boys can be seen when we view other Scriptural comparisons.

- ▣ When Israel gathered manna the day before the Sabbath, they were allowed to gather **"twice as much as they gather daily"** (Ex 16:5).
- ▣ Under the Law, if a man had two wives, one beloved and the other hated, he was commanded to acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, giving him a **"a double portion of all that he hath"** (Deut 21:17).
- ▣ When the mighty prophet Elijah

give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Lk 19:8).

- ▣ When Joseph fed his brothers, and without them realizing it was him, *"Benjamin's serving was five times as much as any of"* of his other brothers (Gen 43:34).
- ▣ Solomon said a thief that was caught was required to **"restore sevenfold"** (Prov 6:31).

The point here is that a most extraordinary thing occurred in these four boys. In our world, those who excel are often just barely better than those whom they exceed. A single answer will often separate scholars, or a fraction of a second be the difference between the better athlete and those who follow him. In a day when photo-finishes are required, and judges must deliberate and see replays to

determine who is the best, the account before us is worthy of notice. No extensive deliberation was necessary. Nor, indeed, were selective tests required, or an adjustment in the criterion of judgment. In **all matters** of wisdom and understanding, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were *“ten times better.”* Thus their faith was honored, the God of the Jews vindicated, and shown to be superior. All of this was accomplished in a deliberate and extended period of interrogation.

IN ALL HIS REALM

“ . . . than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.” Here is most arresting consideration. **The comparison is not made with the other children of Israel, but with established specialists of the land.** In matters requiring expertise and discernment, these four young men were *“ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”* These were the established veterans of the king’s court, and not **prospective** members of that court. Further, the fact that those with whom Daniel and his friends were compared were from *“all of his realm,”* confirms the nature of Nebuchadnezzar’s interrogation. He did not simply ask questions of them and personally evaluate their answers. There was apparently consultation with his established advisors. In that consultation, the superiority of the boys answers became apparent. The experience of the boys was much like that of Jesus in the Temple when He was twelve years of age.

Because a considerable amount of comparison will be made with these wise men of Babylon, it will be profitable to briefly comment on them here.

☐ **MAGICIANS.** These were the *“wise men”* of Babylonia. Historians say it applied to those who healed the sick by singing. It also applied to those practicing magical arts and incantations, and those who accomplished things surpassing human powers. There are several Scriptural references to such men. In Joseph’s day, before he interpreted the Pharaoh’s dream concerning the lean and fat cattle, the Pharaoh put the matter before his *“magicians”*

The picture at the right represents a priest, or diviner, with a gazelle. This is one of the orders mentioned in the book of Daniel, relating to the “magicians” of our text. This is a picture of the only perfect piece of sculpture found by Botta in one of the large courts of Khorsabad. BARNES COMMENTARY



(Gen 41:8,24).

When Moses was sent by God to order Pharaoh to let His people go, he confronted Egyptian magicians. When Aaron threw his rod down and it became a serpent, these *“magicians also did the same things by their secret arts”* ^{NIV} (Ex 7:11). They also *“did the same”* ^{NIV} as Moses in turning water to blood, and bringing frogs out of the water (Ex 7:22; 8:7). They could **not**, however do the same as Moses in bringing forth lice from the dust, or any of his miracles after that (Ex 8:18).

These magicians are further mentioned in Daniel 2:2,10,27; 4:7,9; and 5:11. They will compete with Daniel throughout this book.

☐ **ASTROLOGERS.** Other versions refer to these as *“conjurers,”* ^{NASB} *“enchanters,”* ^{NIV} *“users of secret arts,”* ^{BEB} *“sorcerers,”* ^{Septuagint} and *“soothsayers.”* ^{NJB} The original word has a variety of meanings, including necromancer, conjurer, astrologer, enchanter, and exorcist. ^{STRONGS} A *“conjurer”* is one who practices magical arts, or a wizard. These men are particularly mentioned throughout Daniel (2:2,27; 4:7; 5:7,11,15).

The Law prohibited any involvement with this kind of people – namely those who obtained knowledge or power from other than God. No consultation could be made with one

using *“divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer”* (Deut 18:11). Another breed of these unlawful resources was a *“witch,”* which the Law did not allow to live (Ex 22:18). Isaiah mentioned *“wizards that peep, and that mutter”* (Isa 8:19), forbidding any consultation with them. He also mentioned *“astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators,”* challenging Israel to see if they could save them (Isa 47:13).

The Ephesians, who believed, came, confessed the deeds, and *“them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men”* (Acts 19:19). Preceding their penitence, a woman possessed with a *“spirit of divination”* precisely defined Paul and company, telling who they were and what they had come to do (Acts 16:17). Add to this certain of Satan’s ministers, who transform themselves into *“ministers of righteousness”* (2 Cor 11:15). Additionally, there are *“principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places”* (Eph 6:12). Later in Daniel, we will hear of a lofty evil power who withstood a mighty angel for twenty-one days (Dan 10:13).

Thus, the field of competitive spiritual influences is seen to be vast and powerful enough to impact anyone who does not possess faith. They include:

- ☐ Magicians
- ☐ Astrologers
- ☐ Diviners
- ☐ Observer of times
- ☐ Enchanters
- ☐ Witches
- ☐ Consulters with familiar spirits
- ☐ Wizards
- ☐ Necromancers
- ☐ Stargazers
- ☐ Monthly prognosticators
- ☐ Those using curious arts
- ☐ Ministers of Satan who transform themselves into ministers of righteousness.
- ☐ Principalities
- ☐ Powers
- ☐ The rulers of the darkness of this world.

☐ Spiritual wickedness in high places.

All of these influences have been around for a long time. Vast segments of the world have been controlled by some of them, such as Persia and Greece, which are specifically mentioned as being under the control of inimical spiritual influences (Dan 10:20). They are not to be viewed as fictitious, or having neither reality nor power. **Were such the case, we would have God condemning something that does not even exist, which is unthinkable** (Deut 19:10-11; Ex 22:18; Lev 19:26,31; 20:26,27; 1 Sam 28:3,7,9; 1Ch 10:13; 2 Chron 33:6; Isa 8:19,20; 47:13; Ac 19:19; Ga 5:20).

Thus, we have this vast array of unlawful sources of power and knowledge, many of which were found in both Egypt and Babylon. Israel spent four hundred and thirty years in Egypt, and seventy in

Babylon. Both were especially dominated by Satan and his hosts. Yet, the faithful survived them all!

In Daniel's day, these powers were at their peak, and those influenced by them were vaulted into places of political and social prominence. Now, the wisdom and understanding of four young boys is compared with the seasoned veterans of the dark world. And what will the comparison yield? Will Nebuchadnezzar be able to see the difference? And, what will he do if he does see it?

"In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."^{NIV} It made no difference where the magicians and enchanters were, or if they were in communicative clusters, or meditating

upon a mountain. They simply could not compete with those to whom God had given *"knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom."*

Let no believer imagine for a moment that God cannot make them equal to the challenges of where they are! There is no need to compromise, or to adapt to the passing fashions of this world. The four children of Judah are testimonies to us of the effectiveness of faith.

They loudly declare to us that those who resolutely purpose to keep from being defiled, will be strengthened by God to do so. He can turn the hearts of those over His people toward them, to give them honor and consideration. He can enable them to pass any test that is leveled at them by the world, and to stand up under any comparison with their peers.

DANIEL CONTINUES

"²¹ And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus." The NIV reads, *"And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus."* That is, he remained in the king's court without interruption until that time. Some commentators are confused by this statement, for later Daniel received a special vision in *"the third year of Cyrus king of Persia"* (10:1). The text simply means that Daniel's presence in the court was continuous and uninterrupted until the first year of Cyrus' reign. After that he remained prominent, but was not always in the king's court. During the reign of Belshazzar, for example, the king

was not aware of Daniel until his wife told him (Dan 5:11-12), thereby confirming he was not time in the court at that.

Cyrus reigned from 550 BC until 530 BC. Nebuchadnezzar overthrew Jehoakim and took the four children of Judah captive around 602 BC. Allowing for the three year preparation of the boys, that means Daniel remained uninterrupted in the king's court from approximately 599 BC to 551 BC, a period of about 48 years. That alone is remarkable. Still, Daniel was also prominent in the reign of Darius the Mede. It is not certain precisely when his

reign began, or when it concluded. It appears, however to be one of significant length, giving you a rough idea of the length of Daniel's prominence – most likely over seventy years. His ministry stands as one of the longest of any prophet or man of God.

IT ALL STARTED

And, it all started with four young boys being captured and taken to Babylon! Their first great test was whether or not they would eat and drink things that would defile them. They kept the faith, and did not waver from their purpose. The rest is history.

CONCLUSION

Like Jeremiah before him (Jer 1:6-7), Daniel was called to the work of a prophet when young. So far as we know, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were not prophets. They were endowed with wisdom from God, and were later *set over the affairs of the province of Babylon,* while Daniel sat in the gate of

the king, or in the royal court (Dan 2:49). The last we read about these three, renamed *"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,"* they were *"promoted"* by king Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3:30). One fourth of the way through the book of Daniel, they disappear from its pages. **We never again hear of them in Daniel, or any**

other book of the Bible. Daniel then becomes the premier figure in the book.

Among other things, this confirms the superiority of prophecy to other gifts. As it is written, *"greater is he that prophesieth"* (1 Cor 14:5). That principle is lived out in this book.

During their young years, one of the secrets of the stability these four was their fellowship with one another. They stood together, whether against the diet or the edicts of the king. No doubt they were of great assistance to one another during their three years of preparation. Although they all excelled in wisdom and understanding, only one of them excelled

in prophesying and interpretations.

You must not forget the great lessons of the passage we have reviewed. Those who purpose to please God will be strengthened by Him. None will be ashamed who put their trust in God, whether before the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, the magicians and

astrologers of Babylon, or others who have had opportunities similar to their own.

There is no reason why you cannot take your stand for truth just as Daniel and his friends. God will honor your faith and commitment as surely as He honored theirs. That is the Divine manner.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 3/8/2002. We will continue in our overview of Daniel, covering verses 1-12 of the second chapter. The lesson is titled, **"THE WISDOM THAT DOES NOT STAND THE TEST."** There are two realms from which wisdom comes: "above," and the "earth" (James 3:15-17). There are two sources of wisdom, the Lord, and the devil. Our text will confirm the total superiority of the wisdom from above, which comes from the Lord, and the utter impotence of earthly wisdom, which proceeds from the devil. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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