

## Daniel: A Man of God

### Daniel: Chapters 1-6

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My name is Daniel – at least that’s the name my parents gave me. I was born in the country of Judah at a very difficult period of our nation’s history. We were once part of the nation called Israel, but our nation was divided after the death of King Solomon. The northern ten tribes became known as Israel and we took the name of the larger of the two tribes that remained – Judah.

My godly parents taught me as a child to follow God faithfully – to refrain from eating certain foods, to pray three times a day to our God, and to take good care of our bodies.

There was corruption and sin everywhere – from the kings, to the priests, to the common people. Many were worshipping false gods of all kinds. The true prophets of God had warned us many times over the years, but the people would not listen. The northern kingdom of Israel was already in exile in Assyria. Somehow, Judah survived. But now the prophets warned that we would be conquered – not by Assyria, but by Babylon.

It happened just as the prophets had foretold. Many in Judah were slaughtered by Nebuchadnezzar. I was taken as a young teen to Babylon – along with many others: like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. You may remember them better by the names given us by our Babylonian captors: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I was also given another name: Beltshazzar.

The four of us were selected because of our royal blood or nobility. Of course, I like to think it was because of our youthful appearance and good looks. We were also chosen because we were healthy, intelligent, and well-educated to learn the Babylonian language and magic and fortune-telling.

The king wanted to make sure we stayed healthy and strong so he ordered Ashpenaz, who was head of the palace staff, to make sure that we ate from the royal menu – the best food and the finest wine. After three years of training, we would be given positions in the king’s court.

When we saw what was on the king’s menu – all that rich food and wine, we knew we had to do something quickly. Our stomachs couldn’t stomach all those delicacies. We told Ashpenaz that we would not defile ourselves by eating meat that still had blood in it, and other foods forbidden by our religion.

Ashpenaz’s face turned white. He feared for his life as well for the lives of us 4 Hebrews. He was afraid that the four of us would not look as healthy as the rest of those in training. I made him a deal. “Give us nothing but water and vegetables, and if after ten days we are not as healthy as the others, then we will try something different.”

After ten days we were more robust and looked better than those who had been eating from the king’s menu. So he continued to exempt us from the king’s food and wine.

God gave us knowledge and skill in books and in life. God also gave me the ability to understand visions and dreams.

After three years of training were completed we were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar who interviewed each of us. All four of us passed with flying colors, so we became part of the king's court. Whenever the king consulted us about books or life, he rated us higher in wisdom than all the magicians and enchanters in his kingdom – all of them.

King Nebuchadnezzar started to have strange dreams and wanted to know what they meant. He called in the Babylonian magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and fortune-tellers and asked them to tell him his dream and what it meant.

They said, "Tell us the dream, O King, and we will interpret it."

The king's reply was: "This is my decree: If you cannot tell me the dream and its interpretation, I will have you ripped to pieces, limb from limb, and your homes torn down. But if you tell me the dream and the interpretation, I will lavish you with gifts and homes. So go to it. Tell me the dream and the interpretation."

They insisted that the king had to first tell them the dream, then they could tell him what it meant. The king knew that they didn't have a clue. They were just stalling for time. He lost his temper and ordered all of the Babylonian wise men killed.

I wasn't present at that meeting, but I would be executed as well. When Arioch, chief of the royal guard was preparing to carry out the king's orders, I wisely took him aside and asked what was going on. Arioch told me the dilemma. So I went to the king and asked for a little time so I could interpret his dream for him.

I went home and told my three companions what was going on. I asked them to pray to God for help in solving the mystery so the four of us would not be killed.

That night the answer of the mystery was given to me in a vision. The next morning I went back to Arioch and said, "Call off the execution. Take me to the king and I will interpret the dream."

Arioch didn't waste a minute. He ran to the king, bringing me with him. He said, "I've found a man from the exiles of Judah who can interpret the dream."

Nebuchadnezzar said, "Are you sure you can do this? Tell me the dream and what it means."

I was careful from the start to explain it wasn't me, but God who can interpret it. No human can solve the mystery. "Here is the dream you had, O King. I can interpret it, not because I am smarter, but because God the Revealer of Mysteries revealed it to me."

You saw a huge statue in front of you and it was terrifying to you. The head of the statue was pure gold, the chest and arms were silver, the belly and hips were made of iron, and the feet were a ceramic mixture. While you were looking at the statue, a stone cut out of a mountain by an invisible hand hit the ceramic feet smashing them. The whole thing fell to pieces – the ceramic, iron, bronze, silver, and gold – smashed to bits. The stone became a huge mountain.

Here's the interpretation, O King. You are the gold head. God has blessed you and given you control over vast areas. But your kingdom will be taken over by another kingdom, inferior to yours, and that one by a bronze kingdom. The fourth will be iron-like in strength and will bust up the previous kingdoms. The last kingdom won't bond and hold together. This is what will happen in years to come.

The king's response was: "Daniel, your GOD is beyond all question the GOD of all gods, the Master of all kings." Then he promoted me, lavishing me with gifts, and made me governor of all Babylon and head of all the Babylonian wise men. At my request, the king appointed my three friends to administrative posts throughout Babylon.

Later Nebuchadnezzar was relaxing on his bed when he had another dream that scared him – a nightmare that shook him up. He called all the wise men of Babylon and told them the dream, but none of them could interpret it. Then I walked in. He told me the dream and said, "Daniel, you are full of the Holy Spirit. What does this dream mean?"

I began to shake. So many thoughts were going through my mind, it terrified me. Nebuchadnezzar told me to stay calm and not let the interpretation of the dream scare me.

I began, "O King, I wish the dream was about your **enemies**, and not about **you**. The tree you saw that grew so tall and sturdy with its top reaching the sky is you, O King. You are that tree. You have grown great and strong. But then the tree is cut down with only the stump and roots left. The meadow is soaked with heaven's dew. God has sentenced my master, the king. You will be driven away from human company and live with wild animals for seven seasons. You will graze on grass like an ox, soaked with heaven's dew. After seven seasons, you will learn that the High God rules over human kingdoms. Then your dream about the stump and roots means that your kingdom will still be there when you recover.

Here's my advice: Make a clean break with your sins and start living for others. Quit your wicked living and look after the needs of the down and out. Then you will continue to have a good life."

Twelve months later Nebuchadnezzar was walking on the balcony of his royal palace in Babylon and started boasting about how great Babylon was and all because of him. At that moment God struck him and took away his kingdom for seven seasons. He ate grass like oxen. His hair grew like feathers, and his nails like the claws of a hawk. After seven seasons he got his mind back and glorified God.

After Nebuchadnezzar died, his son Belshazzar took over the kingdom. He did not learn the lessons Nebuchadnezzar had, but defied the God of heavens.

One day Belshazzar gave a huge feast and brought out the gold and silver chalices that his father had stolen from our Temple in Jerusalem so they could drink their wine out of them. While drunk they praised their gods and goddesses made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. At that moment the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the walls of the palace.

When the king saw this disembodied hand writing, he turned white as a ghost, scared out of his wits. His legs went limp and his knees knocked. He yelled for all the wise men to come and interpret the words that appeared. He promised one-third of the kingdom to anyone who could read it and tell him what it meant. They all tried, but none could make any sense of it. So now the king was **really** frightened.

The queen heard of the hysteria among the king and his noblemen and came to the banquet hall. She told him to calm down. She knew someone who could interpret the handwriting on the wall. She reminded him of Daniel who was well-known for his intelligence and spiritual wisdom.

So he called me in. The king spoke to me, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, who can interpret mysteries? If you can read the writing and interpret it for me, you will be rich and famous – and rule over one-third of my kingdom.

I began by reminding that it was God who had made his father and his kingdom great. “You are as arrogant as even he was. You took the sacred vessels from the Temple to toast your gods while treating with contempt the Living God. Here is the interpretation of the words.

**Mene:** God has measured the years of your rule, and they don’t add up.

**Teqel:** You have been weighed on the scales, and you don’t weigh much.

**Peres:** Your kingdom is divided between the Medes and the Persians.

Belshazzar did as he promised. He put a purple robe on me, a gold chain around my neck, and made me ruler over one-third of the kingdom, But that night Belshazzar was murdered and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom.

Darius reorganized his kingdom. He appointed one hundred-twenty governors to administer all the parts of the kingdom. Over them were three vice-regents – I was one of the vice regents. The governors reported to the vice-regents who made sure everything was in order for the king.

The king watched how I did things and was so impressed that he put me in charge of the whole kingdom – over all the vice-regents. They did not like it that I was promoted over them, so they tried to dig up some dirt from my past. They were unable to find any.

So they went to King Darius and said, “O King, live forever. We have gotten together, all the governors, vice-regents, and all the leading officials and we think you should make the following decree: ‘For the next thirty days, no one is to pray to any god or mortals except to you, O King. Anyone who disobeys will be thrown into the lion’s den’”

King Darius signed the decree and sealed it with his signet ring. The decree was sent throughout the empire.

When I heard that the decree had been signed and posted, I continued to pray as I always did in my upstairs with a window facing Jerusalem, thanking and praising God. When those conspirators found me praying to God and not to King Darius, they reported back to the king. He was very upset and tried his best to keep me out of the lion’s den. They reminded the king that a decree cannot be taken back, so he called for me. He told me, “Daniel, your God to whom you are so loyal is going to get you out of this.”

I was thrown into a den of lions and a stone placed over the opening and sealed with the king’s ring. I slept fine, but the king didn’t. He came down to the lion’s den and called out to me, “Daniel, servant of the Living God, has your God, whom you serve so loyally, saved you from the lions?”

I said, “O King, live forever. My God sent his angel, who closed the mouths of the lions so they could not hurt me.”

The king was so happy, he ordered me out of the den. When I was hauled out, he saw that there wasn’t a scratch on me and so he trusted God.

Then he commanded that those conspirators, along with their wives and children be thrown into the lion’s den. Before they hit the floor, the lions had them in their jaws, tearing them to bits,

King Darius sent out a proclamation to everyone on earth that my God was to be worshipped and feared everywhere. I was treated well during the reign of Darius and also of Cyrus who followed him. Yes, all through my life, because I honored God, God honored me. Amen.