

# PURPOSE OF HEART IN A PAGAN LAND

Theme: Usefulness to God in future circumstances comes from faithfulness to God in present tests.  
(Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version; copyright 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc.)

The Book of Daniel is one of the most remarkable books of all time. It tells us--among other things--the story of a man who stands out as one of the most exemplary men in all of Scripture for righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14, 20) and wisdom (Ezekiel 28:3). He may have been a member of the royal family of Judah (as suggested by Daniel 1:3); but he was given the highest possible education in the learning of what was the greatest world culture of the time. He has a distinction that seems truly unprecedented in all world history--that is, as a foreigner who served in the highest official capacity in the governments of two successive world empires (those of the Babylonian and the Media-Persian). And what's more, the book that bears his name is--as Dr. Walvoord noted--"the most comprehensive and sweeping revelation recorded by any prophet of the Old Testament" (John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1971], p.29).

The Book of Daniel can be divided naturally into two parts. The first part is concerned primarily with Daniel's personal history (chapters 1-6); and the second part is concerned primarily with Daniel's prophetic ministry (chapters 7-12). Chapters 2 through 7 are largely written in the Aramaic language--the predominate Gentile language of the world empire of that day. This is because these chapters concern themselves with matters that deal with God's plan for the Gentile world; while chapter 1 and chapters 8-12--written in Hebrew--deal with God's plan for the Jewish people against the backdrop of the history of the Gentile world.

This book was written, in part, to encourage faithfulness on the part of the Jewish people during times of oppression. But God's greater purpose in this book is that of laying out before us His plan for the nations prior to the return of Jesus Christ. Because it describes the events of world history with such remarkable prophetic accuracy, some have doubted that it was truly written by the man Daniel during the 6<sup>th</sup> century before Christ. Because it describes history before it occurred with such precision, some have insisted that it must have been written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century before Christ. But it is clearly referenced in the Book of Ezekiel (see above) which was written during the time of Israel's captivity; and Daniel's authorship is attested to by no less than the Lord Jesus Himself (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14).

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The first chapter sets the tone for much that will follow in the book. In it, we see the character of this great man to whom God revealed so much of His plan for the ages. We see . . .

## **I. DANIEL'S BEGINNINGS IN THE LAND OF EXILE (vv. 1-2).**

Daniel's story begins with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and besieged it for the first time in the year 605 B.C.--shortly after his notable victory of Egypt in the Carchemish. The story of his coming to Jerusalem--and the tragic fall of King Jehoiakim of Judah into his hands--is told in 2 Kings 24:1-2 and 2 Chronicles 36:5-7.

In that respect, it's important to note what we're told, in verse 2. It was not merely Nebuchadnezzar who brought this about. Rather, we're told that "the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand".

## **II. DANIEL'S OPPORTUNITIES BEFORE THE KING (vv. 3-7).**

Among the many articles of the temple that Nebuchadnezzar brought to the house of his god--along

with many of the captives of Jerusalem--were some of the finest young men of Israel that could be found. These would be cared for by him, taught under his command, and made into loyal servants in his kingdom. They were chosen for their physical superiority, their intellectual capacities, and their personal potential to stand before the king honorably. They would undergo a rigorous program of education and training. They would be taught the language and literature of the Chaldeans; and would be provided with the finest delicacies of the king's own table. After three years, they would be presented before the king.

We're told that among these remarkable young men were four from Judah: Daniel ("God Is Judge"), Hananiah ("Jehovah Has Been Gracious"), Mishael ("Who Is What God Is?"), and Azariah ("The Lord Helps"). They were entrusted to the chief of the eunuchs; who then gave them Babylonian names: Daniel became Belteshazzar ("May Bel Protect His Life"), Hananiah became Shadrach (a compound name meaning "command" with a reference to Aku, the moon-god), Mishael became Meshach ("Who Is What Aku Is?"), and Azariah became Abed-nego ("Servant of Nebo", a son of the Babylonian god Bel). The change of names somewhat reflected their original Hebrew names; and was the king's way of separating them from their Hebrew roots and establishing them in the Babylonian culture. It's interesting to note that Daniel's Babylonian name is similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar's son, found later in the book (see 5:1); but that God's angelic messenger used his Hebrew name (Daniel) when speaking to him (9:22).

### **III. DANIEL'S PURPOSE OF HEART BEFORE GOD (vv. 8-10).**

Daniel (and no doubt his friends) purposed themselves to stay faithful to the Jewish dietary laws (see Leviticus 11), even while living in a pagan land. It may have also been because the king's food had been offered to idols--which would be why Daniel refrained from partaking of his wine. He requested that he might not "defile" himself. The fact that Daniel was in favor with the king's chief eunuch is a clear testimony to his outstanding character. But the eunuch feared for his life if Daniel didn't eat the king's food. If the four young men did not look as healthy as the others, it would mean the chief eunuch's head (see also Nehemiah 2:1-2).

### **IV. DANIEL'S PROPOSAL IN A TIME OF CHALLENGE (vv. 11-16).**

Daniel proposed to "the steward"--that is, a lower official who worked under the chief eunuch (called in the original language "the Melzar")--that a time of testing be administered. For ten days, he and his companions would only eat vegetables. After that time period, they could be reexamined, and the Melzar could do as he thought best. Most likely, if they failed to show an improvement, they still would have refused to defile themselves--and would have willingly suffered the consequences! At the end of the ten-day trial, however, they looked better than all the others. As a result, the Melzar took the king's provision away from all the young men and fed them the diet that Daniel and his friends had requested. Daniel had acted wisely before authority. He didn't resist or rebel; but offered an alternative.

### **V. DANIEL'S BLESSEDNESS UPON EXAMINATION (vv. 17-21).**

God blessed Daniel and his three friends with great superiority over the others. They were outstanding in knowledge of literature and wisdom; and Daniel was especially blessed with the ability to understand dreams and visions (an ability that plays a large role in the remainder of the book). Upon appearing before the king, they were found to be (literally) "ten hands" above all the others; and were made to serve the king. Daniel remained in service until the reign of King Cyrus of the Persians--some sixty five years later!

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Daniel's obedience to God's law--even in a pagan land, and during a time when no one else would obey--was a test of faithfulness. He was respectful; but his faithful stand led to God granting him the privilege of serving as the prophet of the ages. God gave Him great insight, because he had proven faithful in a small thing. This reminds us that our own usefulness to God in future circumstances comes from our faithfulness to God in present times of testing. Will we stand faithful--and make a difference?