

CHAPTER 1

This chapter gives us a more particular account of the beginning of Daniel's life, his original and education, than we have of any other of the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, began immediately with divine visions; but Daniel began with the study of human learning, and was afterwards honoured with divine visions; such variety of methods has God taken in training up men for the service of his church. We have here,

- I.** Jehoiakim's first captivity (v. 1, 2), in which Daniel, with others of the seed-royal, was carried to Babylon.
- II.** The choice made of Daniel, and some other young men, to be brought up in the Chaldean literature, that they might be fitted to serve the government, and the provision made for them (v. 3-7).
- III.** Their pious refusal to eat the portion of the king's meat, and their determining to live upon pulse and water, which, having tried it, the master of the eunuchs allowed them to do, finding that it agreed very well with them (v. 8-16).
- IV.** Their wonderful improvement, above all their fellows, in wisdom and knowledge (v. 17-21).

~~2008~~ DANIEL 1:1-7

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

We have in these verses an account,

- I.** Of the first descent which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, made upon Judah and Jerusalem, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, and his success in that expedition (v. 1, 2.): He *besieged Jerusalem*, soon made himself master of it, seized the king, took whom he pleased and what he pleased away with him, and then left Jehoiakim to reign as tributary to him, which he did about eight years longer, but then rebelled, and it was his ruin. Now from this *first* captivity most interpreters think the seventy years are to be dated, though Jerusalem

was not destroyed, nor the captivity completed, till about nineteen years after, In that first year Daniel was carried to Babylon, and there continued the whole seventy years (see v. 21), during which time all nations shall serve Nebuchadnezzar, and his son, and his son's son, ^{<251>}Jeremiah 25:11. This one prophet therefore saw within the compass of his own time the rise, reign, and ruin of that monarchy; so that it was *res unius aetatis* — *the affair of a single age*, such short-lived things are the kingdoms of the earth; but the kingdom of heaven is everlasting. The righteous, that see them taking root, shall *see their fall*, ^{<888>}Job 5:3; ^{<196>}Proverbs 29:16. Mr. Broughton observes the proportion of times in God's government since the coming out of Egypt: thence to their entering Canaan forty years, thence seven years to the dividing of the land, thence seven Jubilees to the first year of Samuel, in whom prophecy began, thence to this first year of the captivity seven seventies of years, 490 (ten Jubilees), thence to the return one seventy, thence to the death of Christ seven seventies more, thence to the destruction of Jerusalem forty years.

II. The improvement he made of this success. He did not destroy the city or kingdom, but did that which just accomplished the first threatening of mischief by Babylon. It was denounced against Hezekiah, for showing his treasures to the king of Babylon's ambassadors (^{<236>}Isaiah 39:6, 7), that the treasures and the children should be carried away, and, if they had been humbled and reformed by this, hitherto the king of Babylon's power and success should have gone, but *no further*. If less judgments do the work, God will not send greater; but, if not, he will heat the furnace seven times hotter. Let us see what was now done.

1. The vessels of the sanctuary were carried away, *part* of them, v. 2. They fondly trusted to the temple to defend them, though they went on in their iniquity. And now, to show them the vanity of that confidence, the temple is first plundered. Many of the holy vessels which used to be employed in the service of God were taken away by the king of Babylon, those of them, it is likely, which were most valuable, and he brought them as trophies of victory to the *house of his god*, to whom, with a blind devotion, he gave praise of his success; and having appropriated these vessels, in token of gratitude, to his god, he *put them in the treasury* of his temple. See the righteousness of God; his people had brought the images of other gods into his temple, and now he suffers the vessels of the temple to be carried into the treasuries of those other gods. Note, When men profane the vessels of the sanctuary with their sins it is just with God to profane them

by his judgments. It is probable that the treasures of the king's house were rifled, as was foretold, but particular mention is made of the taking away of the *vessels of the sanctuary* because we shall find afterwards that the profanation of them was that which filled up the measure of the Chaldeans' iniquity, ^{<218>}Daniel 5:3. But observe, It was only *part of them* that went now; some were left them yet upon trial, to see if they would take the right course to prevent the carrying away of the remainder. See ^{<278>}Jeremiah 27:18.

2. The children and young men, especially such as were of noble or royal extraction, that were sightly and promising, and of good natural parts, were carried away. Thus was the iniquity of the fathers visited upon the children. These were taken away by Nebuchadnezzar,

(1.) As trophies, to be made a show of for the evidencing and magnifying of his success.

(2.) As hostages for the fidelity of their parents in their own land, who would be concerned to conduct themselves well that their children might have the better treatment.

(3.) As a seed to serve him. He took them away to train them up for employments and preferments under him, either out of an unaccountable affectation, which great men often have, to be attended by foreigners, though they be blacks, rather than by those of their own nation, or because he knew that there were no such witty, sprightly, ingenious young men to be found among his Chaldeans as abounded among the youth of Israel; and, if that were so, it was much for the honour of the Jewish nation, as of an uncommon genius above other people, and a fruit of the blessing. But it was a shame that a people who had so much wit should have so little wisdom and grace. Now observe,

[1.] The directions which the king of Babylon gave for the choice of these youths, v. 4. They must not choose such as were deformed in body, but comely and well-favoured, whose countenances were indexes of ingenuity and good humour. But that is not enough; they must be *skilful in all wisdom*, and *cunning*, or *well-seen in knowledge*, and *understanding science*, such as were quick and sharp, and could give a ready and intelligent account of their own country and of the learning they had hitherto been brought up in. He chose such as were young, because they would be pliable and tractable, would forget their own people and

incorporate with the Chaldeans. He had an eye to what he designed them for; they must be such as had ability in them to *stand in the king's palace*, not only to attend his royal person, but to preside in his affairs. This is an instance of the policy of this rising monarch, now in the beginning of his reign, and was a good omen of his prosperity, that he was in care to raise up a succession of persons fit for public business. He did not, like Ahasuerus, appoint them to choose him out young women for the service of his government. It is the interest of princes to have wise men employed under them; it is therefore their wisdom to take care for the finding out and training up of such. It is the misery of this world that so many who are fit for public stations are buried in obscurity, and so many who are unfit for them are preferred to them.

[2.] The care which he took concerning them. *First*, For their education. He ordered that they should be taught *the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans*. They are supposed to be wise and knowing young men, and yet they must be further taught. *Give instructions to a wise man and he will increase in learning*. Note, Those that would do good in the world when they grow up must learn when they are young. That is the learning age; if that time be lost, it will hardly be redeemed. It does not appear that Nebuchadnezzar designed they should learn the unlawful arts that were used among the Chaldeans, magic and divination; if he did, Daniel and his fellows would not defile themselves with them. Nay, we do not find that he ordered them to be taught the religion of the Chaldeans, by which it appears That he was at this time no bigot; if men were skilful and faithful, and fit for his business, it was not material to him what religion they were of, provided they had but some religion. They must be trained up in the language and laws of the country, in history, philosophy, and mathematics, in the arts of husbandry, war, and navigation, in such learning as might qualify them to serve their generation. Note, It is real service to the public to provide for the good education of the youth. *Secondly*, For their maintenance. He provided for them *three years*, not only necessaries, but dainties for their encouragement in their studies. They had *daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank*, v. 5. This was an instance of his generosity and humanity; though they were captives, he considered their birth and quality, their spirit and genius, and treated them honourably, and studied to make their captivity easy to them. There is a respect due to those who are well-born and bred when they have fallen


into distress. With a liberal education there should be a liberal maintenance.

III. A particular account of Daniel and his fellows. They were of the *children of Judah*, the royal tribe, and probably of the house of David, which had grown a numerous family; and God told Hezekiah that of the children that should *issue from him* some should be taken and made eunuchs, or chamberlains, *in the palace of the king of Babylon*. The *prince of the eunuchs* changed the names of Daniel and his fellows, partly to show his authority over them and their subjection to him, and partly in token of their being naturalized and made Chaldeans. Their Hebrew names, which they received at their circumcision, had something of God, or Jah, in them: *Daniel* — *God is my Judge*; *Hananiah* — *The grace of the Lord*; *Mishael* — *He that is the strong God*; *Azariah* — *The Lord is a help*. To make them forget the God of their fathers, the guide of their youth, they give them names that savour of the Chaldean idolatry. *Beltshazzar* signifies the *keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel*; *Shadrach* — *The inspiration of the sun*, which the Chaldeans worshipped; *Meshach* — *Of the goddess Shach*, under which name Venus was worshipped; *Abed-nego*, *The servant of the shining fire*, which they worshipped also. Thus, though they would not force them from the religion of their fathers to that of their conquerors, yet they did what they could by fair means insensibly to wean them from the former and instil the latter into them. Yet see how comfortably they were provided for; though they suffered for their fathers' sins they were preferred for their own merits, and the land of their captivity was made more comfortable to them than the land of their nativity at this time would have been.

DANIEL 1:8-16

DANIEL'S CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

We observe here, very much to our satisfaction,

I. That Daniel was a favourite with the *prince of the eunuchs* (v. 9), as Joseph was with the keeper of the prison; he had a *tender love* for him. No doubt Daniel deserved it, and recommended himself by his ingenuity and sweetness of temper (he was *greatly beloved*,  Daniel 9:23); and yet it is

said here that it was God that *brought him into favour with the prince of the eunuchs*, for every one does not meet with acceptance according to his merits. Note, The interest which we think we make for ourselves we must acknowledge to be God's gift, and must ascribe to him the glory of it. Whoever are in favour, it is God that has brought them into favour; and it is by him that they *find good understanding*. Herein was again verified That work (⁴¹⁶Psalm 106:46), *He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives*. Let young ones know that the way to be acceptable is to be tractable and dutiful.

II. That Daniel was still firm to his religion. They had changed his name, but they could not change his nature. Whatever they pleased to call him, he still retained the spirit of an Israelite indeed. He would apply his mind as closely as any of them to his books, and took pains to make himself master of the *learning and tongue of the Chaldeans*, but he was resolved that *he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat*, he would not meddle with it, nor *with the wine which he drank*, v. 8. And having communicated his purpose, with the reasons of it, to his fellows, they concurred in the same resolution, as appears, v. 11. This was not out of sullenness, or peevishness, or a spirit of contradiction, but from a principle of conscience. Perhaps it was not in itself unlawful for them to *eat of the king's meat* or to *drink of his wine*. But,

1. They were scrupulous concerning the meat, lest it should be sinful. Sometimes such meat would be set before them as was expressly forbidden by their law, as swine's flesh; or they were afraid lest it should have been offered in sacrifice to an idol, or blessed in the name of an idol. The Jews were distinguished from other nations very much by their meats (⁴¹⁵Leviticus 11:45, 46), and these pious young men, being in a strange country, thought themselves obliged to keep up the honour of their being a peculiar people. Though they could not keep up their dignity as princes, they would not lose it as Israelites; for on that they most valued themselves. Note, When God's people are in Babylon they have need to take special care that they *partake not in her sins*. Providence seemed to lay this meat before them; being captives they must eat what they could get and must not disoblige their masters; yet, if the command be against it, they must abide by that. Though Providence says, *Kill and eat*, conscience says, *Not so, Lord, for nothing common or unclean has come into my mouth*.

2. They were jealous over themselves, lest, though it should not be sinful in itself, it should be an *occasion of sin* to them, lest, by indulging their appetites with these dainties, they should grow sinful, voluptuous, and in love with the pleasures of Babylon. They had learned David's prayer, *Let me not eat of their dainties* (⁴⁰⁴Psalm 141:4), and Solomon's precept, *Be not desirous of dainties, for they are deceitful meat* (⁴⁰⁵Proverbs 23:3), and accordingly they form their resolution. Note, It is very much the praise of all, and especially of young people, to be dead to the delights of sense, not to covet them, not to relish them, but to look upon them with indifference. Those that would excel in wisdom and piety must learn betimes to *keep under the body and bring it into subjection*.

3. However, they thought it unseasonable now, when Jerusalem was in distress, and they themselves were in captivity. They had no heart to *drink wine in bowls*, so much were they *grieved for the affliction of Joseph*. Though they had royal blood in their veins, yet they did not think it proper to have royal dainties in their mouths when they were thus brought low. Note, It becomes us to be humble under humbling providences. *Call me not Naomi; call me Marah*. See the benefit of affliction; by the account Jeremiah gives of the princes and great men now at Jerusalem it appears that they were very corrupt and wicked, and defiled themselves with things offered to idols, while these young gentlemen that were in captivity would not defile themselves, no, not with their *portion of the king's meat*. How much better is it with those that retain their integrity in the depths of affliction than with those that retain their iniquity in the heights of prosperity! Observe, The great thing that Daniel avoided was defiling himself with the pollutions of sin; that is the thing we should be more afraid of than of any outward trouble. Daniel, having taken up this resolution, *requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself*, not only that he might not be compelled to do it, but that he might not be tempted to do it, that the bait might not be laid before him, that he might not see the portion appointed him of the king's meat, nor look upon the wine when it was red. It will be easier to keep the temptation at a distance than to suffer it to come near and then be forced to *put a knife to our throat*. Note, We cannot better improve our interest in any with whom we have found favour than by making use of them to keep us from sin.

III. That God wonderfully owned him herein. When Daniel requested that he might have none of the king's meat or wine set before him the prince of the eunuchs objected that, if he and his fellows were not found in as good

case as any of their companions, he should be in danger of having anger and of losing his head, v. 10. Daniel, to satisfy him that there would be no danger of any bad consequence, desires the matter might be put to a trial. He applies himself further to the under-officer, Melzar, or the steward: “*Prove us for ten days; during that time let us have nothing but pulse to eat, nothing but herbs and fruits, or parched peas or lentils, and nothing but water to drink, and see how we can live upon that, and proceed accordingly,*” v. 13. People will not believe the benefit of abstemiousness and a spare diet, nor how much it contributes to the health of the body, unless they try it. Trial was accordingly made. Daniel and his fellows lived for ten days upon *pulse and water*, hard fare for young men of genteel extraction and education, and which one would rather expect they should have indented against than petitioned for; but *at the end of the ten days* they were compared with the other children, and were found *fairer and fatter in flesh*, of a more healthful look and better complexion, than *all those who did eat the portion of the king's meat*, v. 15. This was in part a natural effect of their temperance, but it must be ascribed to the special blessing of God, which will make a little to go a great way, a *dinner of herbs* better than a *stalled ox*. By this it appears that *man lives not by bread alone*; pulse and water shall be the most nourishing food if God speak the word. See what it is to keep ourselves pure from the pollutions of sin; it is the way to have that comfort and satisfaction which will be *health to the navel and marrow to the bones*, while the pleasures of sin are *rottenness to the bones*.

IV. That his master countenanced him. The steward did not force them to eat against their consciences, but, as they desired, *gave them pulse and water* (v. 16), the pleasures of which they enjoyed, and we have reason to think were not envied the enjoyment. Here is a great example of temperance and contentment with mean things; and (as Epicurus said) “he that lives according to nature will never be poor, but he that lives according to opinion will never be rich.” This wonderful abstemiousness of these young men in the days of their youth contributed to the fitting of them,

1. For their eminent services. Hereby they kept their minds clear and unclouded, and fit for contemplation, and saved for the best employments a great deal both of time and thought; and thus they prevented those diseases which indispose men for the business of age that owe their rise to the intemperances of youth.

2. For their eminent sufferings. Those that had thus inured themselves to hardship, and lived a life of self-denial and mortification, could the more easily venture upon the fiery furnace and the den of lions, rather than sin against God.

DANIEL 1:17-21

WISDOM OF DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS

Concerning Daniel and his fellows we have here,

I. Their great attainments in learning, v. 17. They were very sober and diligent, and studied hard; and we may suppose their tutors, finding them of an uncommon capacity, took a great deal of pains with them, but, after all, their achievements are ascribed to God only. It was he that *gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; for every good and perfect gift is from above, from the Father of the lights.* It is the Lord our God that *gives men power to get this wealth; the mind is furnished only by him that formed it.* The great learning which God gave these four children was,

1. A balance for their losses. They had, for the iniquity of their fathers, been deprived of the honours and pleasures that would have attended their noble extraction; but, to make them amends for that, God, in giving them learning, gave them better honours and pleasures than those they had been deprived of.

2. A recompence for their integrity. They kept to their religion, even in the minutest instances of it, and would not so much as defile themselves with the king's meat or wine, but became, in effect, Nazarites; and now God rewarded them for it with eminency in learning; for God *gives to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy with them,* ^{<017>}Ecclesiastes 2:26. To Daniel he gave a double portion; he had *understanding in visions and dreams;* he knew how to interpret dreams, as Joseph, not by rules of art, such as are pretended to be given by the oneirocritics, but by a divine sagacity and wisdom which God gave him. Nay, he was endued with a prophetic spirit, by which he was enabled to converse with God, and to receive the notices of divine things in dreams and visions, ^{<016>}Numbers 12:6. According to this gift given to Daniel, we

find him, in this book, all along employed about dreams and visions, interpreting or entertaining them; for, *as every one has received the gift*, so shall he have an opportunity, and so should he have a heart, to *minister the same*, ¹1 Peter 4:10.

II. Their great acceptance with the king. After *three years* spent in their education (they being of some maturity, it is likely, when they came, perhaps about twenty years old) they were presented to the king with the rest that were of their standing, v. 18. And the king examined them and *communed with them* himself, v. 19. He could do it, being a man of parts and learning himself, else he would not have come to be so great; and he would do it, for it is the wisdom of princes, in the choice of the persons they employ, to see with their own eyes, to exercise their own judgment, and not trust too much to the representation of others. The king examined them not so much in the languages, in the rules of oratory or poetry, as *in all matters of wisdom and understanding*, the rules of prudence and true politics; he enquired into their judgment about the due conduct of human life and public affairs; not “Were they wits?” but, “Were they wise?” And he not only found them to excel the young candidates for preferment that were of their own standing, but found that they had *more understanding than the ancients, than all their teachers*, ⁹⁹Psalm 119:99, 100. So far was the king from being partial to his own countrymen, to seniors, to those of his own religion and of an established reputation, that he freely owned that, upon trial, he found those poor young captive Jews ten times wiser and *better than all the magicians that were in all his realm*, v. 20. He was soon aware of something extraordinary in these young men, and, which gave him a surprising satisfaction, was soon aware that a little of their true divinity was preferable to a great deal of the divination he had been used to. *What is the chaff to the wheat?* what are the magicians' rods to Aaron's? There was no comparison between them. These four young students were better, were *ten times* better, than all the old practitioners, put them all together, that were *in all his realm*, and we may be sure that they were not a few. This contempt did God pour upon the pride of the Chaldeans, and this honour did he put upon the low estate of his own people; and thus did he make not only these persons, but the rest of their nation for their sakes, the more respected in the land of their captivity. *Lastly*, This judgment being given concerning them, they *stood before the king* (v. 19); they attended in the presence-chamber, nay, and in the council-chamber, for to *see the king's face* is the periphrasis of a privy-

counsellor, ^{<1714>}Esther 1:14. This confirms Solomon's observation, *Seest thou a man diligent in his business, sober and humble? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.* Industry is the way to preferment. How long the other three were about the court we are not told; but Daniel, for his part, *continued to the first year of Cyrus* (v. 21), though not always alike in favour and reputation. He lived and prophesied after the first year of Cyrus; but that is mentioned to intimate that he lived to see the deliverance of his people out of their captivity and their return to their own land. Note, Sometimes God favours his servants that mourn with Zion in her sorrows to let them live to see better times with the church than they saw in the beginning of their days and to share with her in her joys.