

DANIEL SPEAKS TODAY

You usually leave your dessert to eat last, but let's begin with the good news first: *you can understand the book of Daniel!* Jesus told us to read it and He wouldn't promise that we could "understand" it if we couldn't (Matthew 24:15).

Yes, it is true that Daniel was told to "shut up the words, and seal the book." But being "shut up" and "sealed" was to last only until "the time of the end." Then would come a change: "knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4). We are now living in that "time of the end."

What Jesus said means that God and all His holy angels want you to understand the message of this precious book. Worldwide, millions are now reading it. As never before in history the Bible has become "a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path" (Psalm 119:105).

In love to you, God gave it long ago. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21, NKJV). Others through the ages have preserved it at the cost of sufferings and even martyrdoms. It's through the Bible that God speaks to human hearts today.

Daniel has survived attacks from those who doubt its inspiration. Modern discoveries of buried records in the Middle East confirm this book as written by the prophet when he lived in the Iraq of long ago. Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of the world, had something special to say about it. Concerning "Daniel the prophet," We have the highest authority for studying the book of Daniel in two phases; namely, his prophecies and his character. In answer to the question His disciples asked, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" the Saviour said, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (whoso readeth, let him understand)." The Saviour makes direct reference to the prophecies of Daniel. Whoso readeth, let him understand. The apostle says, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding." The Lord will give every person an understanding of the book of Daniel, who will read it with the interest manifested by the prophet of God himself.

Ezekiel says, "Though Noah, Daniel and Job were in" the land, "they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel 14:14. Notice it is by their righteousness. Christ's imputed righteousness, which is received by faith, must be so

wrought into the character, that it will be exemplified in the lives of the remnant, in order that they may stand without a mediator.

Before you open the book, do something special: bow your heart before God and ask for His Holy Spirit to be your Teacher. "Behold, I will pour out My spirit unto you," He says, "I will make known My words unto you" (Proverbs 1:23). The Holy Spirit "shall teach you all things," and "guide you into all truth" (John 14:26; 16:13). "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7). These promises must apply especially to Daniel.

But let's be careful. Some are "unlearned and unstable" and "wrest [it], as they do the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 1:20). "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20), that is, no one can dream up his own personal explanation of it. "Comparing spiritual things with spiritual" is the way (1 Corinthians 1:13). We shall have the help of the same angel to whom God commanded, "Gabriel, make this man [Daniel] to understand the vision" (Daniel 8:16). If God so wanted Daniel to understand, surely He will help us to understand.

The faith of Daniel delivered the Jews. It brought from heaven the angel Gabriel and our Lord Jesus Christ; and they stood by the king of Persia until the prayer of Daniel was answered. So the prevailing prayers, and the burden resting upon those who are represented by Daniel, will be the salvation of other souls besides themselves. None are representatives of Daniel, unless they feel that burden, and have prevailing prayer with God as Daniel did.

There are "scholars" who believe Daniel was written by a novelist, not a true prophet. Miracles can't happen is the idea. No "prophet" in the 6th century B.C. could predict future events as Daniel did. Therefore, they insist, the book is a forgery from about the middle of the 2nd century before Christ. This unknown novelist made up these stories about an imaginary man to whom he gave the invented name of "Daniel." Then he tried to make people think they were "prophecies."

But there are facts: (1) The language used in Daniel is not that which a later writer would use; it is correct only for the time of a real Daniel in the 7th or 6th century B.C. (2) Accurate historical details such as Belshazzar being the last king of Babylon could not have been known to a later writer of the 2nd century B.C. The author of Daniel proves that he actually lived in the time of the fall of Babylon and the beginning of the Medo-Persian Empire. (3) If Daniel is a

forgery, its author was guilty of a capital crime *because he claimed to be speaking of visions which the Lord Himself had given him*: “The prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, . . . *even that prophet shall die*” (Deuteronomy 18:20). Could Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, have been fooled into believing Daniel was a true prophet when he wasn’t? He said he is “Daniel the prophet” (Matthew 24:15). We accept Daniel as a truly inspired prophecy.

We are not trying to blaze the way to some new discovery in history or theology. Our goal is to find the gospel in Daniel and open it so it makes sense all the way through to the ordinary reader.

Daniel 1:1-2: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.”

It was a time of transition. Judah existed on a narrow strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the eastern desert. That narrow corridor of land stood squarely in the path of conquest from both the Egyptians to the south and the Mesopotamian powers of Assyria and Babylon to the north. Repeatedly, powerful military forces from the north and the south pushed through Palestine. In rapid succession, the little kingdom of Judah came under the control of three different nations in the late seventh century B.C.

First, there was Assyria. Ashurbanipal, the last great king of the Assyrian Empire, died in 626 B.C., just two or three years before Daniel was born. With his death, major changes took place in the Near East. The Assyrian Empire broke up into many pieces, and for a time the people of Judah enjoyed a respite as Assyrian control was weakened. King Josiah took the opportunity of that interval to begin a religious reformation in the country (2 Kings 22:8-23:25). As the prophet Jeremiah indicated, however, Josiah’s reform did not go deep enough or last long enough.

In this power vacuum, the aggressive pharaohs of the twenty-sixth dynasty in Egypt soon moved into position to take control of Western Asia as far as the Euphrates River where they held sway for approximately a decade. Meanwhile, a new power was rising in the east. The Babylonians, joining with the Medes from the mountains of northern Iran, successfully attacked the major population centers of

Assyria—Nimrud and Nineveh. They conquered these cities and then destroyed them. As they moved up the eastern branch of the Euphrates, their activities brought them into confrontation with the Egyptians in the area of the upper river.

After an initial skirmish in 611 B.C., the Babylonians and Egyptians fought a major battle in 605 B.C. Jeremiah mentions this battle in Jeremiah 46:1-12, where he provides a view of the disastrous defeat of the Egyptians.

These decisive events turned the whole political landscape of the ancient Near East upside down. What had formerly been under the control of Egypt now came under the control of Babylon, including all the territory south to the border of Egypt. Quite naturally, that included the kingdom of Judah. Royal records from Babylon illuminate this situation.

Jehoiakim, the king of Judah at the time, could see that resistance to Nebuchadnezzar was futile, and he surrendered. Jehoiakim surrendered and fell into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar not just because he was a bad king, which he was, but because God permitted and directed events in this way. There was an unseen factor involved in the course of these events, and that factor was a divine one. Daniel 1:2 says, “And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.” While this was not God’s original intent for His people, their apostasy—led by King Jehoiakim—brought about this sad course of events. Since God’s people had relinquished their faith in Him and had given up participating in His covenant, they had also forfeited His protection from enemies such as Babylon (Deut. 28:1-30:20).

Here we jump into the middle of an exciting time of national disaster. This was God’s true people who have just been defeated in war, with captives carried off to Babylon! God had chosen them to be His special treasure on earth, to let their light shine so that all nations might learn the glorious news of His salvation for all people. But now comes this tragedy.

What a pity! Those people of the one true God should never have been conquered and carried as captives to Babylon! What fun these heathen soldiers must have had laughing and mocking the religion of God’s people! Although Jerusalem tried to defend herself, her cause was hopeless, for the Lord Himself “gave” King Jehoiakim and his people into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. “Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1). But those people

didn't want the Lord to "keep" their city; they would trust their military might.

Repeated warnings by prophets sent of God to His people predicted this. Moses himself had said that if they should turn their backs on the commandments of God they would be carried captive into heathen lands (see Leviticus 26:33-35; Deuteronomy 28:64). Jeremiah, a later prophet, reminded Judah that if they had been faithful to God and kept the Sabbath day holy, Jerusalem would have stood impregnable forever as a glorious city (see Jeremiah 17:24-27; 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21). Elijah in King Jeroboam's day repeated the prophetic warning (1 Kings 14:15), as did Amos the prophet (Amos 5:27). Isaiah made it clear 120 years before it happened that Jerusalem would be taken by the Babylonians. These were the very people to whom the foolish king Hezekiah had proudly displayed his royal treasures (Isaiah 39:6, 7). Because God's people would not heed the warnings of His prophets, He could do nothing else than back off, and give them up to the destruction that pagan nations would wreak upon them.

Parents must consider that it was because of the wickedness of King Manasseh, Hezekiah's improperly trained and unconverted son, that all this evil befell Judah. Manasseh led the whole nation so deeply into idolatry and paganism that they never were able to recover until after seventy years of exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 15:4). Children become a blessing or curse to the world according as their parents train them.

Verses 3-4: "And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

When Daniel arrived in Babylon, he began an extensive course of study. The different disciplines which he mastered were to enable him to become better Babylonian bureaucrats, better government servants. He undoubtedly studied the Babylonian cuneiform writing. This involved learning an elaborate system of signs to be incised upon soft clay with a pointed stylus. Cuneiform writing has provided us with some of the oldest samples of writing produced by the human race. Many examples have survived the centuries and with good reason—when the clay hardened, it provided a relatively permanent

record. If the records were very important, such as state documents of a king, the cuneiform tablets involved were fired in a kiln. This hardened them even more than drying in the sun and made them very durable, much more durable than the paper we use today. If the records were not so important, they were left to dry naturally and harden more gradually. These less durable tablets were more easily broken, which is why excavators digging in ancient Near Eastern ruins often find many more fragments than whole tablets. It takes careful work in a museum to piece together those fragments of tablets that belong together.

Even though the Babylonian writing system was cumbersome to learn, the language itself probably was not very difficult for Daniel and his friends. Babylonia belongs to what is known as the East Semitic language family, while Hebrew belongs to the West Semitic group. Both are in the same general language family, and it would not have been very difficult for Daniel to pick up the Babylonian language. In addition, some of the work at the Babylonian court was done in Aramaic, a language even closer to Hebrew.

Nebuchadnezzar himself was not a native-born Babylonian in the ethnic and cultural sense. He, and his father Nabopolassar before him, belonged to one of the tribes of the Chaldean people who lived in southern Babylonia. These tribes spoke Aramaic, thus Nebuchadnezzar's own native tongue would have been Aramaic. It was quite natural, therefore, for Daniel to converse with Nebuchadnezzar in this language. Several of the conversations between these two is recorded in Aramaic. This provides an explanation why the book was written in two languages—chapters 1, 8-12 in Hebrew and chapters 2-7 in Aramaic.

From the clay tablets we know about the Babylonians' astronomical calculations and their system of mathematics. Our modern system of mathematics is based upon units of ten, the decimal system. But the Babylonian system was based on units of six, known as sexagesimal mathematics. Some of this system has come down to us today; it explains why there are sixty seconds in a minute, sixty minutes in an hour, and 360 degrees in a circle. The Babylonian system shows up in Daniel 3 where the measurements of the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up—sixty cubits high and six cubits wide—are given in typical Babylonian sexagesimal measurements.

One of the more unpleasant problems the Hebrews faced in the Babylonian curriculum was the subject of astrology. The scientific

side of that subject is astronomy, and that was not a problem. The interpretive, subjective side of this subject, however, is astrology. Babylonian culture was steeped in this sort of thing, and the Hebrew captives were probably introduced to it in their classes.

Here we find a sharp, distinct difference between the Bible and the ancient world. The ancient world was much devoted to the subject of astrology, observations based on the motions of the heavenly bodies used to predict human events and their outcomes. The Bible, however, is diametrically opposed to this sort of thing. This opposition is clearly stated in both Mosaic legislation (see Deut. 18:9-14), and by the prophets (see Isa. 8:19, 20). In this respect, therefore, the Bible stands diametrically opposed to some of the practices that went on in the environment surrounding the Israelites. Daniel and his friends would undoubtedly have opposed the use of these astrological methods in their work for the government of Babylon. They had a source upon which to rely for a knowledge of the future that was much more sure than the divination practices of Babylon. That source was the true God.

It is a paradox that Daniel was eventually placed in charge of the wise men of Babylon (2:48) who were active practitioners of astrology.

Verse 5: "And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king."

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was to enrich the government of Babylon with the talents of these young men, as well as convert them gradually to the heathen religion of the Chaldeans. He was sure his pagan religion was the true one, for hadn't his gods defeated the great God of Israel?

These boys were likely in their late teens at this time, for they had already attained wisdom and skill "in knowledge and understanding." Consider them the computer gurus of that day.

Verses 6, 7: "Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego."

Even though a vigorous faith in the true God was largely lacking in Judah at this time, there still were those who were faithful to God. Daniel and his friends were among those who held on to their faith in

spite of the generally prevailing apostasy. This did not prevent them from being taken into exile, but it did give them the opportunity to witness for their faith during that exile. In fact, the faithfulness of these servants of God in even the most trying of times is one of the bright spots in the book of Daniel. The question comes to us then: Do we meet similar, or even lesser trials in our lives with a corresponding measure of faith? With such a strong example of courage and faith left for us by Daniel and his friends, should we not exercise the same devotion and trust in God to meet the trials that come to us?

Imagine yourself in Daniel's situation. You are young, just on the verge of beginning your adult life. Every opportunity seems to stretch before you. But then a sudden curve in the pathway of experience appears before you. Instead of being able to take advantage of the opportunities in your own home, city, and country, you are dragged off to a foreign land quite remote from your own. Further, you are given no privileges in your journey and have to walk four hundred miles across the desert to get to your destination. You have no assurance that you will ever see your home or family again. In fact, it looks very much as though you will not. What would your attitude have been? Discouragement? Depression? Would you have questioned how God could have done all this to you? Now that no one from your homeland could see you, would you have decided that you might as well live any way you could to get along in the land of your captors?

Some of these ideas may well have passed through the minds of Daniel and his friends, but they gave them no permanent heed in reacting to their difficult circumstances.

Taking hostages from captive countries was standard policy exercised by both the Babylonians and Egyptians. Young men of considerable potential were taken back to the heartland of the empire to be trained in Babylonian or Egyptian ways and culture. This was done for a purpose. The point was to train these young men for future service to the empire. When the current king or administrators of the captive countries passed off the scene of action, their places could be taken by natives of those countries who had now been trained in Babylonian or Egyptian thinking. In that way Babylon, for example, could obtain administrators who had an intimate knowledge of the local customs of the people whom they governed, but who would have their ultimate loyalties cultivated toward Babylon through their education.

The Hebrew name Daniel signified “judge of God;” Hananiah, “gift of the Lord;” Mishael, “who is what God is;” and Azariah, “whom Jehovah helps.” The Chaldean names given them honored various heathen deities. The Chaldeans hoped to cause these Jewish youth to forget their early training in the love and service of Jehovah, and to learn to worship the pagan idols.

Once he arrived in the capital, Daniel was given the new name of Belteshazzar (1:7). This is a sentence which breaks down into three components: *Belit*, the title of a goddess; *shar*, the word for “king”; and the verb *uzur*, which means “to protect.” Literally, therefore, Daniel’s Babylonian name means, “May [the goddess] Belit protect the king.” The Babylonians wanted to give these captives names which would be easy to recognize by the Babylonians with whom they would be working.

Thank God that in the midst of the wickedness and apostasy in Judah and Jerusalem, there were a few homes where reverence for God was preserved! Though we do not know her name, Daniel’s mother deserves great honor. Her boy, now far from home in the midst of a wicked and degraded court life, remained true to the right teachings of his mother. His courageous and firm stand for truth put heart into his three companions to be faithful also. Our world needs more parents like Daniel’s mother! And thank God, today He has some out there like her.

Verse 8: “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: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”

Students complaining about the food they are served at school is not a modern phenomenon; it goes back a long way, 2,500 years in this case! Why did Daniel refuse to eat the food that was provided from the royal quartermaster depot or kitchen? The text gives us a clear answer: “Daniel resolved not to defile himself.”

It would have been an interesting conversation to listen to as Daniel was trying to explain to the Babylonian official this defilement based upon the dietary laws set out in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14! Among the cuneiform texts are some list of the foodstuffs that were provided to the Babylonian army. Supplies included pork. For an Israelite, pork was unclean and considered unfit to eat. If pork was supplied to the army in the field, it probably was supplied to the bureaucrats in the palace and to students in the scribal school. Thus

Daniel and his friends would have had to face the issue of unclean meat being served to them.

Some of the meat provided in Babylon may have been offered to idols (1 Cor. 8). Babylonian butchers would not have prepared any of their meats in a way that would have been considered kosher for a Jew (Lev. 17:10-14). The preparation could also have involved highly spiced foods.

The easiest and most direct way to avoid all of these problems was to eat a vegetarian diet and drink only water. That is what Daniel requested of the official. Literally, he asked for “seed-food,” that which grows from seeds, or plant food (1:12). Daniel could see the problems involved in the Babylonian diet, and he could also see that the most direct way to avoid them was to avoid the problem altogether rather than to try to eat his way around it. He asked for a vegetarian diet and the principal nonalcoholic beverage available—water.

Daniel recognized what the Apostle Paul many years later taught—that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He knew that to defile it with improper food or drink is a sin against ourselves and against our Creator (see 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 10:31). His strength of character was the result of a decided purpose of heart. He knew how to say “No!” to temptation so definitely that the tempter had to flee from him. Daniel’s remarkable clearness of mind and strength of body were the result of faithful adherence to right ways of eating and drinking. We too can enjoy the same blessings as we rule our appetites and passions instead of letting them rule us.

The first chapter introduces him as a health reformer at the risk of his own life. He purposes not to defile himself with the king’s meat, nor with the wine which the king drank. He is introduced to us as a strict vegetarian; but there were those brethren who did not stand the test. The tenth chapter has a record of a prayer, the answer to which is the vision of the eleventh and twelfth chapters. He is introduced to us in this prayer, as one who ate no pleasant bread, neither did flesh nor wine come into his mouth. He was fasting,—not a total fast,—but he refused flesh and pleasant bread (which is pastry, pies, sweet cakes, etc.) and wine; and was seeking God for an understanding of what He had revealed to him. In other words he was a strict vegetarian; and when that vision had been revealed to him, the Lord said, “Go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” So he comes upon the stage of action, and

leaves the stage of action, a vegetarian. All that we know of his diet is that he did not eat flesh or drink wine.

Verses 9, 10: "Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king."

The official was reluctant to put Daniel on that kind of regimen. He was afraid that it would have adverse effects upon the Hebrews. But Daniel persisted and was eventually given permission to eat his preferred diet for a period of ten days (vs. 14).

This little detail gives us a glimpse into the social context. There were others of "the children of Judah" in this same group who obviously did *not* adhere to the principles of temperance which were taught the people of God. They may even have ridiculed and persecuted Daniel because of his desire to be faithful, even in a foreign land. Even today the most bitter persecution a Christian can take is often from his own "brothers and sisters" supposed to share Christian fellowship with him. Ridicule is a lethal weapon of persecution.

Verses 11-16: "Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse."

Ten days out of his three-year course was not too much to risk, but even so, the official only reluctantly gave Daniel and his friends permission to do so. The official was responsible for the captives' welfare, and if they suffered from this new diet, he would suffer from Nebuchadnezzar's wrath (vs. 10). Kings of the ancient world were noted for their tendency to punish the messengers who brought bad news.

Could a period of only ten days really make a difference? In modern society's approach to health, there are a number of examples which demonstrate that ten days can indeed make a difference. One special diet plan advertised on American television promises, "Give us a week, and we'll take off the weight!" Thus Daniel's request for ten days as a period of test was reasonable, even though he probably would have liked to have had more time.

It was not just the ordinary force of human circumstances that opened up this possibility to Daniel. He was not just a better nutritionist or exercise physiologist or intellectually superior to the other students enrolled. He was able to obtain the favor of the official and carry out this program because "God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel" (vs. 9). Intelligent as he was, Daniel had still another factor operating in his favor, and that factor was the most important—divine favor. In this situation, God was able to use and bless Daniel and his friends because of their faith in Him and His promises.

God not only wants us to have spiritually alert minds, but He wants us to have healthy bodies as well. The two are directly related. "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food" (vs. 15). Having passed this ten-day test, Daniel and his friends were able to eat the diet they wanted for the rest of their three years in school. Continuing on this diet for that length of time also contributed to their excellent outcome at the end of the course.

The Hebrew word here translated "pulse" is the same as "seed" in Genesis 1:29. This "seed" was the Creator's original plan for man's food. "I have given you every herb bearing seed, . . . and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat [food]." Daniel's diet thus included more than just one monotonous thing. It was also fruits, grains, nuts, and vegetables, and the wonderful drink which God has given us for our health—pure water, and unfermented fruit juices. These boys really had a continual picnic.

As Daniel expected, after ten days of this simple but nourishing diet, his health was excellent, and that of his companions also. They were able to study easily. It is just as true today that healthful diet and physical habits are an aid to mental and moral strength. Students in school don't have to follow the crowd. They can enjoy standing out different, and follow the youthful Daniel's example.

Verses 17-21: “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. 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. 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. 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. And Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus.”

At the end of their three-year course, the final graduation examination was an oral one (vss. 19, 20). Indeed, their oral examiner was the most important person of all, more important than any of the professors they had had during their studies. The final oral examiner was none other than the king himself. He wanted to see what they had accomplished during their period of training and to see if they were accomplished during their period of training and to see if they were satisfactorily qualified to take up posts in the Babylonian government. Once again, Daniel came through with flying colors. Using hyperbole, the text describes them as being ten times better than the other wise men in Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom. This does not mean that Daniel got 100 percent on his exam and that the other wise men of Babylon got only 10 percent. It simply means that the Hebrews were clearly more outstanding than the other students in the course and that they were superior even to the professional wise men who had already taken upon their posts.

What was the real reason Daniel and his friends did so well on their oral examination before the king? Was it because they had higher IQs? Was it because they were on a healthier program? These things may have helped, but more than these things, it was the direct blessing of God. “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding” (vs. 17). Without the blessing of God, these young men would not have done as well as they did. God had a plan and a purpose for them, and He wanted to demonstrate that fact before all of the wise men of Babylon, before their fellow students, and before the king. God has a plan and a blessing for your life, too, although it may not work out just exactly the way it did for these captive students in Babylon.

The character of Daniel is cited by the prophet Ezekiel as an example of the character that those who serve God in the last days of the world's history will have (14:20). Great events will be taking place in heaven and earth, which they must know how to understand if they are to be in tune with what God is doing in the earth. For this reason, His people today will live healthfully and temperately, as Daniel did in the king's palace.

He is introduced to us by that which lies at the very foundation of Christian character. He had been taken, with his brethren, to enter the king's university for a three years' course. He knew the effect of a flesh diet on the mind. There were just four who stood the test upon the diet question, and came out from the university ten times wiser than those who ate at the king's table. There are lots of people down here who do not stand the test along the line of diet, and when the plagues come, you will see the difference. Now this is the way that Daniel is introduced to us. These four names are given, and have come down to us, because they were uncompromising in their principles of righteousness. The wisdom of these four men was brought into direct contact with the wisdom of the world, and God honored his name through them, because they would not compromise principle, and let it trail in the dust. Sometimes it is a very little thing that tests people. It is a test of principle rather than some big undertaking. Many would be shocked at a great crime, but when principle is tested on so simple a matter as a little piece of meat, or drinking a little wine, we will yield without compunctions of conscience.

In Ezekiel 28:3, Daniel is again referred to, and the prince of Tyrus. The prince of Tyrus represents Satan, and Daniel, the people of God. Said the prophet to the prince of Tyrus, "Behold, thou art wiser than Daniel." When was Satan wiser than Daniel?—When he was a covering cherub. But now Daniel possesses the wisdom of God, because he was true to principle under the circumstances in which he was placed, and was therefore wiser than the devil. He ate no pleasant bread nor flesh, neither did he drink any wine.

The indulgence of appetite was the first great sin of the human race (see Genesis 3:6). The grace of Christ is much more abounding than all the allurements of our sinful nature which we have inherited by birth from the fallen Adam. Jesus was tempted more than we can be tempted when He fasted for forty days. His overcoming grace is given freely to all; now, let's receive the gift. Says our friend and brother the

apostle Paul: “I follow after, . . . forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. . . . I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Philippians 3:13, 14; 4:13).

It’s impossible to estimate the enormous suffering there is in the world due directly to unrestrained appetite. Everywhere you turn you see obesity, heart disease, lung cancer from smoking, cirrhosis of the liver from drinking, alcoholism; well, the plagues are endless. Jesus is already the Savior of the world (John 4:42), but He is helpless to save people who resist and reject His salvation that He *gives* them. We could weary you with endless statistics of suffering and premature death, so much of it unnecessary. And Jesus Christ is forced to have to watch it all, to see the needless tears, to sympathize with the needless pain, to share the often needless funeral grief. Says Isaiah: “In all their affliction He was afflicted. . . . In His love and in His pity He redeemed them,” because He has become one of us (63:9). He has taken upon Himself our fallen, sinful nature, as a member of our humanity. It’s time for us to learn to sympathize with Him in His sufferings that He feels for humanity.

Here’s a passage that speaks of all the unnecessary sin there is in the world, but it can apply also to the unnecessary sickness and suffering: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23). You can hear the overtones of the wailing of God. He loves these people who are killing themselves! “Why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (33:11).

Look at the reward for temperance and self-control that we see in Daniel’s book. He and his companions far excelled all the other students at the end of their three years’ university training. Are you interested in further education? Here is something for you to notice.

God was preparing these youths to be witnesses for Him, for through them He would give knowledge of the gospel to all the world of their day. It would be fantastic—hang on, the story comes later in our book.

Where are the youth of today who will follow the example of Daniel and his three companions, that God may fit them to be a blessing to the world?

Can we find the gospel in Daniel? Or is it all about “beasts” and world empires?

This first chapter packs a powerful gospel punch: here are four young men in university training where their scholarships provide them access to the elitist dining rooms or cafeterias in the empire's capital. They will be served the same gourmet bill of fare from the same kitchens that cater to royalty.

The delicacies on their table are the envy of wealthy Babylonians. The meats come from the fabled outreaches of the empire, the desserts are super mouthwatering. But Good News saved them from health disaster and muddled minds in a time of crisis.

These four petition the authorities for a simple, low-fat, low-sugar vegetarian diet. With the hearty appetite that all teens have, these four "purpose" in their hearts to deny natural cravings for rich food and to choose the simple diet. They will not patronize the McDonalds, Burger Kings, pancake houses, or steak houses of their day. Their goal is not merely to live seven years longer and keep going to their Disney World; they want to keep their minds clear to comprehend the teaching of the Holy Spirit in an era of solemn significance.

We're in that kind of era today, on a world scale. It's great Good News that the same world Savior who blessed Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will *give* (not merely *offer*) you and me the victory over runaway appetite. The Holy Spirit will be your day-by-day Teacher; you won't be able to transgress without His first convicting and reminding you of truth. Now don't silence His voice, don't deny His loving reminders of sacred duty. "Purpose in your heart" to follow the Savior in this His great Day of Atonement.