

Daniel 1:1-4

A Long and Winding Road

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. – Daniel 1:1-4 ESV

This book is an enigma to many. It is filled with familiar stories like Daniel in the lions' den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego surviving the furnace of fire. It also contains bizarre eschatological imagery that rivals the Book of Revelation. In part, it's a story of a nation's fall and a young man's journey to a foreign land where he rises to a place of prominence and power. It's a classic Horatio Alger story with a biblical twist to it. Yet, the Book of Daniel is far more than a rags-to-riches tale. It is a divinely inspired work that chronicles the life of a real-life man named Daniel whom God used to reveal the future fate of the nation of Israel.

The story begins with Daniel and three of his fellow Israelites who have been deported to the land of Babylon. They were part of a contingent of Jewish citizens who had been captured during the fall of Jerusalem and transported to Babylon as slaves. But the story goes back much further than that, all the way to the days of Moses when he was leading the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt to the land that God had promised them as their inheritance: The land of Canaan.

They were the descendants of Abraham and heirs to all the promises God had made to him. Their patriarch, Abraham, had once been a pagan living in Ur of the Chaldeans, far to the east of the land of Canaan. He was an idol worshiper and a Gentile. Yet, God appeared to Abraham and delivered a surprising and life-changing message.

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." – Genesis 12:1-3 ESV

This was the first time Abraham had heard from God, yet he obeyed the call. With his family and servants in tow, he made his way to Canaan, the land God had promised would be the new home of the great nation Abraham and his wife would produce. But there was a problem; Abraham's wife Sarah was barren and unable to bear children. Over the decades, this aging couple tried to produce an heir, but their attempts failed and their hope began to waver. But

God eventually blessed them with a son named Isaac who would later father a son named Jacob. As the story unfolds, Jacob and his two wives produce 12 sons. While far from a “great nation,” Jacob’s growing family was proof that God was fulfilling His promise to Abraham. Yet, another important part of the promise was yet to be fulfilled.

Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” – Genesis 15:13-16 ESV

When a famine struck the land of Canaan, Jacob and his family were forced to relocate to Egypt where food was plentiful. Little did Jacob know that a son whom he had long thought to be dead was alive and well in Egypt. Joseph had always been Jacob’s favorite son, but he had been killed by a lion while tending sheep, or so Jacob thought. Joseph had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and transported to Egypt. But through a series of divinely ordained events, Joseph rose from obscurity and became the most powerful man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. The reason Egypt had food during a time of famine was that Joseph had orchestrated a years-long conservation plan to ensure that Egypt’s storehouses were full. So, when Jacob and his seventy family members arrived in Egypt, not only did they find food, but they were reunited with their long-lost son and brother.

But this story didn’t have a particularly happy ending. In time Jacob and Joseph died, and the Book of Exodus reveals that “there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” – Exodus 1:1 ESV). During the intervening years, the descendants of Jacob had greatly increased in number, causing the new Pharaoh to view them as a threat to the nation’s well-being. As a result, he issued a series of edicts designed to enslave and demoralize this rapidly growing foreign population. Once welcomed with open arms and awarded their own land within Egypt, the descendants of Jacob now found themselves living as slaves in a foreign land, just as God had predicted.

But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. – Exodus 1:12 ESV

Over time and under immense pressure from the Egyptians, the descendants of Jacob were becoming the “great nation” God had promised He would produce. They even had a new name: The people of Israel.

Years earlier, long before Jacob moved his family to Egypt, God had changed his name to Israel (Genesis 32), which can be translated as “one who struggles with God.” During their time in Egypt these “Israelites” had been fruitful and multiplied, eventually exceedingly well over a million in number. But while they had become a great nation, they were living as slaves. Then God stepped in and rescued them. He sent His servant Moses to deliver them from slavery and

lead them back to the promised land. The Book of Exodus records the amazing story of Israel's deliverance and journey to Canaan. It was a difficult trip filled with trials and tests, most of which the Israelites failed miserably. They proved to be a stubborn and rebellious people, who regularly tried the patience of Moses and God. But eventually, they arrived in the land of Canaan, and, with God's help, they conquered and occupied it. In time, God gave them kings to rule over them, but that period of Israel's history was no less problematic. Due to the disobedience of Solomon, the son of David, God split the kingdom of Israel in two, creating two independent nations with Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

A succession of kings ruled over both nations and the list of their accomplishments and crimes can be found in the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles. Many of these kings proved to be far from faithful to God and led the people of God into apostasy and idolatry. Eventually, God sent the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, destroying the capital city of Samaria and taking the population back to Assyria as captives. Hundreds of years later, the southern kingdom of Judah faced a similar fate, falling to the Babylonians, whom God used as His agents of judgment against His unfaithful and apostate people.

That's where the Book of Daniel picks up the story. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, invaded Judah as part of a larger campaign to conquer the land of Palestine. During the reign of King Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar and his troops subjugated the people of Jerusalem and took the young king captive.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. – 2 Chronicles 36:5-7 ESV

It was on this fateful occasion that Daniel and his three friends were deported to Babylon. They were "youths without blemish," the sons of Jerusalem's privileged upper class. Separated from their families, these young boys were transported hundreds of miles to the capital city of Babylon where their lives would be radically altered. But Daniel and his friends are not the focus of the story. Daniel's relocation to Babylon had a far more important purpose behind it than he or anyone else could have imagined. His rise to power and prominence will be stunning, but the messages he receives from God will be the real point behind his life and the whole purpose behind the book's existence.

What we are about to read is the story of God's redemptive plan for His chosen people. It goes all the way back to Abraham and includes the lives of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Joshua. Kings will come and go. Nations will rise and fall. The faithfulness of the people of Israel will ebb and flow, rise and fall, and eventually come face to face with the righteous judgment of God. Yet, His love and faithfulness endure, His promises remain unwavering, and His plan for their well-being remains unchanged.

“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” – Jeremiah 29:10-11 ESV

But God has more in store for His rebellious people than their return to the land after 70 years in exile. His plan of redemption is far greater than they can imagine, and Daniel will play a vital role in revealing what God has planned for them, and it is yet to be fulfilled.

Daniel 1:5-16

Food For Thought

⁵ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹ And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. – Daniel 1:5-16 ESV

Since the book bears Daniel's name, it's easy to assume that he is its primary character. Its retelling of Daniel's arrival in Babylon and his meteoric rise to prominence within the court of Nebuchadnezzar makes it feel like a biography. Over the centuries there has been much debate concerning the book's authorship, but within its own pages, the evidence points to Daniel.

*In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar **a vision appeared to me, Daniel**, after that which appeared to me at the first.* – Daniel 8:1 ESV

*...in the first year of his reign, **I, Daniel**, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.* – Daniel 9:2 ESV

***While I was speaking** and praying, **confessing my sin** and the sin of my people Israel, and **presenting my plea** before the Lord **my God** for the holy hill of **my God**, **while I was speaking in prayer**, the man Gabriel, **whom I had seen** in the vision at the first, **came to me** in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.* – Daniel 9:20-21 ESV

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no delicacies, no meat or wine entered my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, for the full three weeks. – Daniel 1:2-3 ESV

Throughout the book, Daniel switches from the first-person singular to the third person, a common literary practice among ancient authors. The primary reason some scholars reject Daniel as the book's author is the staggering success rate of the prophecies it contains. The fact that so many of Daniel's predictions come true leads them to conclude that the book was written by an unknown author who lived centuries later.

The Book of Daniel predicts events of the second century before the coming of Jesus (especially the period 175-164 B.C.) with such precision that doubting critics believe it *had* to have been written *after* that period, during the time of the Maccabees (in-between the Old and New Testaments). Supposedly, the purpose for writing Daniel at that time was to inspire God's people on to victory during the Maccabean wars. – David Guzik, *Daniel: The Enduring Word Commentary*

Critical scholars, unwilling to accept the supernatural nature of the book's prophetic visions, have attempted to explain it all away by arguing for an anonymous author who used Daniel as a mouthpiece. By recasting the events of his own day as the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, the author was merely attempting to encourage his contemporary readers. Yet, Jesus, who lived centuries after the events recorded in the book, believed Daniel was its author.

"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)..." – Matthew 24:15 ESV

But while this suggests that the book is an autobiography, Daniel is not telling *his* story. He is simply a player in the grand drama that began with the call of Abraham in Ur. Daniel and his companions were caught up in a much larger story that spans from God's creation of the universe to His ultimate act of re-creation recording in the Book of Revelation. This book was not intended to set Daniel up as an icon of virtue or a model for godly living. While he and his friends exhibit admirable qualities and demonstrate a commitment to God worthy of emulation, they are not to be worshiped as heroes. Too often, the book's content is reduced to little more than a guide for godly living. Lessons have been written with titles like "Dare to Be a Daniel" that attempt to encourage faithfulness and discourage compromised convictions in the face of worldly pressure. But while those are worthy objectives, they can easily lose sight of the book's primary objective.

The opening chapter sets the stage for Daniel's arrival in Babylon. There are no details given as to Daniel's family background or social standing in the city of Jerusalem. Verse 3 states that Nebuchadnezzar issued orders "to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility" (Daniel 1:3 ESV), so it seems likely that Daniel was from an affluent family. It also appears that a selection process was involved that culled out the less attractive "candidates." Daniel was one of the "youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in

all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace" (Daniel 1:4 ESV).

Upon their arrival in Babylon, these young men were separated from their families and taken to the royal palace where they were to be trained "in the language and literature of Babylon" (Daniel 1:4 NLT). In a sense, they were enrolled in a Babylonian boarding school where they were to be inculcated with the wisdom and ways of their new masters. This was nothing less than an intense indoctrination strategy designed to isolate these young men from their parents so they could be reprogrammed and repurposed.

There is no way to determine the exact number of young men who were forced to endure this three-year program of brainwashing and rehabilitation. It's unlikely that the four individuals listed represent the entire "freshman class" of Nebuchadnezzar's elite training program. But Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are listed because they will play important roles as the book unfolds. Each of them is from the tribe of Judah and faces the challenge of maintaining their Jewish heritage and faith in Yahweh as they endure the pressure to adapt to the ways of their new masters.

It all begins easily enough with Daniel and his companions being offered "a daily ration of food and wine" (Daniel 1:5 NLT) from the king's own kitchen. Rather than being treated like slaves, they were feted like royalty, eating food fit for a king. This was likely a ploy to soften them up so they would have a more favorable view of their Babylonian overlords. Along with fine food, they were given new names, another not-so-subtle ploy to reprogram these young men so they would forego their past and embrace their new homeland.

...the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. – Daniel 1:7 ESV

There is far more going on here than providing culturally specific names for these young men. There was a purpose behind the eunuch's choice of names. Daniel's Hebrew name meant "God is my judge," while his new name meant "the prince of Bell." Hannaniah, which means "Beloved by the LORD" was changed to "Illumined by Sun-god." Mishael's name "Who is as God" was changed to Meshach (Who is like Shach). Finally, Azariah (The LORD is My Help) had his name changed to Abed-Nego (Servant of Nego). Each young man's Hebrew name honored Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. But their new names honored one of the gods of the Babylonians. This was another attempt to indoctrinate these young men by removing any attachment they had to their former religion. Everything was being altered; their diet, education, environment, names, and religious affiliation.

Yet, despite the pressure to compromise, Daniel resisted.

Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. – Daniel 1:8 ESV

Daniel and his companions refuse to eat the king's rich and likely, unhealthy diet. The text purposely uses the word "defile." The Hebrew word, *gā'al*, can be translated as "to pollute" or "desecrate." It is a word associated with unacceptable sacrifices offered to God. In the Book of Malachi, God confronts the priests of Israel, accusing them of treating His name with contempt. They declare their innocence and respond, "How have we despised your name?" (Malachi 1:6 ESV). God answers them with a specific charge that uses the same Hebrew word.

"By offering polluted [gā'al] food upon my altar. " – Malachi 1:7 ESV

The content of Daniel's diet is not provided, but it seems likely that it contained meat that had not been processed according to the Mosaic Law. Israelites were forbidden to eat any meat that had not first been drained of all its blood.

"If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood." – Leviticus 17:10-12 ESV

Daniel refused to eat meat that was improperly prepared. To do so would defile himself before Yahweh. His request for a vegetable-based diet reflects his desire to avoid the impure nature of the meat provided by the Babylonians. When Daniel informed the chief eunuch of his decision to fast, he was met with concern, not consternation. The eunuch didn't explode with rage or threaten Daniel with discipline. Instead, he showed unprecedented concern. But the text makes clear that this reaction was God-ordained.

God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. – Daniel 1:9 ESV

This subtle statement sets the tone for the rest of the book, revealing that Yahweh was behind every aspect of Daniel's life and would be intimately involved in every circumstance that unfolded in the days ahead. Even within the confines of Nebuchadnezzar's royal compound, Yahweh was providentially moving behind the scenes to accomplish His will for Daniel and His redemptive plan for the people of Israel. This was about far more than Daniel's diet; it was about the sovereign will of God.

When the eunuch heard the decision of Daniel and his companions, he became concerned that the lack of protein might have a deleterious effect on their health and his own personal well-being.

"If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded." – Daniel 1:10 NLT

But Daniel calmed the eunuch's fears by suggesting a short-term trial to determine the efficacy of a vegetarian diet.

"Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water," Daniel said. "At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's food. Then make your decision in light of what you see." – Daniel 1:12-13 NLT

The eunuch agreed to conduct the test and when the ten days were up, the results were conclusive; Daniel and his friends had not only survived but "looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king" (Daniel 1:15 NLT).

It should be no surprise that this story has been used to elevate Daniel and his friends to saint-like status. This is where the "Dare to Be a Daniel" idea gets its genesis. Another strange but as-to-be-expected conclusion reached from this account is the once-popular "Daniel Diet." Sometimes referred to as the Daniel Fast, this weight-loss program features a 10 to 21-day vegan diet plan based on minimally processed, plant-based foods, and the avoidance of all animal products, caffeine, and alcohol. While there is nothing inherently wrong with a vegetarian diet, that is not the point of this story. There is also nothing wrong with emphasizing Daniel's faithfulness and refusal to compromise his convictions. But, once again, that is not the primary message the story is meant to convey.

God was at work. The very fact that Daniel and his friends were in Babylon was the result of God's sovereign will. The fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians and the deportation of its citizens had all been part of His plan. Nebuchadnezzar had not chosen these young men, God had because He had a plan to use them to accomplish His will. Their decision to refuse the king's food was not a result of their willpower, but of God's Spirit moving in their hearts.

When the text states that "Daniel **resolved** that he would not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8 ESV), it attempts to convey more than just a cognitive decision on Daniel's part. He didn't use logic to reach his conclusion; it was a matter of the heart. The Hebrew could be translated as "he made up his mind" (NET Bible), or better yet, "he placed on his heart." This was a God-directed decision on Daniel's part, and it was necessary so that Daniel and his friends could serve as God's secret agents operating within the enemy camp. Yahweh had work for these young men to do and He was going to protect them and provide for them all along the way.

Daniel 1:17-21

Divinely Anointed and Appointed

¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. ²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. – Daniel 1:17-21 ESV

These last few verses provide a summary statement explaining the real motivation behind the success of Daniel and his friends. These four young had been equipped by God to serve on His behalf in Babylon. Their selection to undergo training in the king's indoctrination program had not been the result of blind luck or chance; it had been the sovereign will of God. They were there for a reason that none of them yet understood. They were not alone because Yahweh was with them, and He had prepared for the ordeal they were about to face.

God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. – Daniel 1:17 NLT

For three years, they consumed their vegetarian diet as well as the academic curriculum fed to them by their Babylonian masters. When their training was complete, they were brought before the king for the final phase of their training. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have been accompanied by all the other Hebrew young men who had been exiled with them and handpicked for the king's training program. But as might be expected, Daniel and his three friends stood out. Their interviews with Nebuchadnezzar made an impression on him.

Their countenance and comprehension excelled that of all the other candidates. These young men were physically and intellectually superior to their peers, and they passed their oral exams with flying colors.

Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom. – Daniel 1:20 NLT

Once again, the author provides insight into the success of the four friends. Their intellectual capacity was God-ordained, not the result of a high IQ. They received the same training as their peers, yet their assimilation of the material was unequaled. As verse 17 makes clear, their aptitude was a gift from God. He had provided them with a special capacity for retention and practical application. Their wisdom exceeded that of the king's most trusted sages and sorcerers, a fact that did not escape Nebuchadnezzar. Like any other king, he was always in

need of wise, reliable counselors with whom he could discuss important matters of state. Up to this point, he had relied upon his “magicians and enchanters” (Daniel 1:21 ESV).

The Hebrew word for “magician” is *ḥarṭōm* and it refers to someone who consults the stars to discern the future or seeks guidance on important matters. In essence, they were astrologers who claimed to have the ability to “read” the stars and provide hidden wisdom. The other group mentioned is the “enchanters.” The Hebrew word is *ʿaššāḇ* and refers to necromancers, those who claimed to communicate with the dead. They used their dark magic to speak to spirits living in the underworld who would provide them with hidden knowledge and supernatural insights.

Necromancy was a common practice in ancient Babylon, where people believed in communicating with the dead to gain insight about the future or to accomplish tasks. In the pagan and polytheistic world of Babylon, priests, magicians, conjurers, and astrologers played a major role in daily life. They even had a god of magic named Marduk, who presided over justice, healing, compassion, regeneration, and fairness.

But Marduk was no match for Yahweh, the God of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In fact, he was no god at all, and the king’s magicians, necromancers, astrologers, and enchanters were either posers or the unwitting pawns of demonic spirits. Any knowledge they gained from dabbling in the dark arts was incomplete at best. Satan and his demons don’t know the mind of God and have no way of discerning or determining the future. Only Yahweh is omniscient and sovereign over the affairs of men. He alone controls the fate of kings and kingdoms.

Little did Nebuchadnezzar know that he had four secret agents of the Almighty who had infiltrated his kingdom. In his pride, he saw these four young men as the byproduct of his elite training school. They had been properly prepared for service in his royal administration. But, in fact, they had been secretly anointed by Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, and would be used as His instruments in the land of the enemy.

Nebuchadnezzar hired them on the spot and elevated them to places of prominence in his court. It isn’t clear whether Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that Yahweh was the source of their wisdom and subsequent promotions. Yet, as the book progresses, their faith in Yahweh will be on full display as they navigate the dangerous waters of Nebuchadnezzar’s godless kingdom. Their faith in Yahweh will be put to the test. The temptation to compromise their convictions will be unrelenting. They will soon discover that, while their promotions will secure them with prominent roles in the king’s court, they will never fit in. Their relationship with Yahweh will make it impossible to assimilate. Maintaining their faithfulness to Yahweh will set them apart and put them at odds with their Babylonian peers. They will have to learn the difficult lesson of living in the world without becoming part of it.

The last line of this opening chapter reveals that “Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus” (Daniel 1:21 ESV). This lets the reader know that Daniel would serve in the royal court

for 66 years, until the Persian takeover of the Babylonian empire. He and his friends would experience the ups and downs of living in a land where they would never be truly welcome. Despite their prominent positions, they would always be viewed as outsiders. Their faith in Yahweh would put them at odds with their coworkers and create a constant tension that, at times, escalated into abject hatred and a desire for their deaths. But they served the king and stayed faithful to their God and, through it all, Yahweh provided for and protected them.

The faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will provide the reader with inspiration. But Daniel's God-given ability to interpret dreams and visions will provide much more. He will reveal aspects of God's divine redemptive plan that involve future events still yet to happen. God was not done with Israel and He is far from done with the world He created. The Israelite's detour to Babylon would eventually come to an end. But, more importantly, the world's long-awaited deliverance from the curse of the fall will one day be removed.

