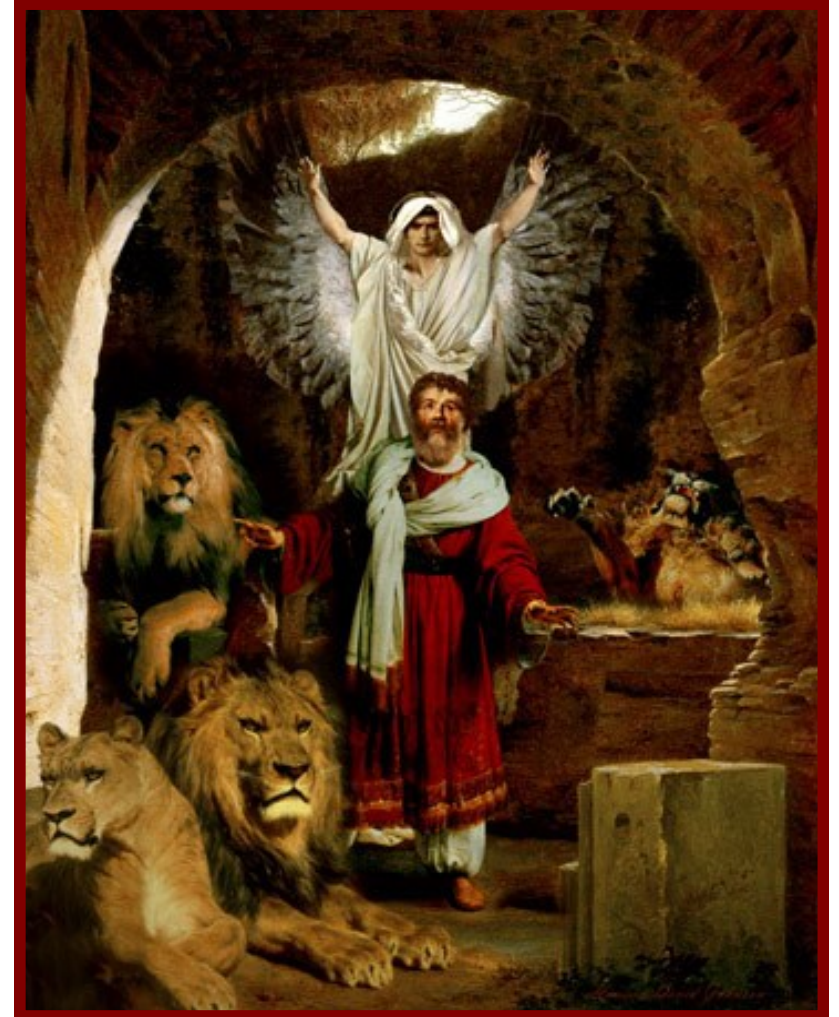


The Book of Daniel

Chapter 1



The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

Chapter 1

Verse 1. *"In the third year of the reign of Joacim (Jehoiakim) king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it"* Jehoiakim, son of the Josiah in whose thirteenth regnal year Jeremiah began to prophesy, and under whom the woman Hulda prophesied, was the same man as was called by the other name of Eliakim, and reigned over the tribes of Judah and Jerusalem eleven years. His son Jehoiachin [misprinted "Joachim" for "Jochin"; cf. IV Reg. 24:6 in the Vulgate] surnamed Jeconiah, followed him in the kingship, and on the tenth day of the third month of his reign he was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar's generals and brought to Babylon. In his place his paternal uncle Zedekiah, a son of Josiah, was appointed king, and in his eleventh year Jerusalem was captured and destroyed. Let no one therefore imagine that the Jehoiakim in the beginning of Daniel is the same person as the one who is spelled Jehoiachin [Lat. *Jochin*] in the commencement of Ezekiel. For the latter has "-chin" as its final syllable, whereas the former has "-kim." And it is for this reason that in the Gospel according to Matthew there seems to be a generation missing, because the second *group of fourteen*, extending to the time of Jehoiakim, ends with a son of Josiah, and the third group begins with Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim. Being ignorant of this factor, Porphyry formulated a slander against

Verse 20. *"And every word of wisdom and understanding the king inquired of them, he found it in them ten times as great as all the soothsayers and magicians put together who were to be found in his entire realm."* For "soothsayers" and "magicians" the Vulgate edition [i.e., of the Septuagint] translated "sophists" and "philosophers"----terms to be understood not in the sense of the philosophy and sophistic erudition which Greek learning holds forth, but rather in the sense of the lore of a barbarian people, which the Chaldeans pursue as philosophy even to this day.

"Daniel therefore continued unto the first year of Cyrus the king." In the later discussion we shall explain how it was that Daniel who is here described as having continued till the first year of king Cyrus afterwards held office in the third year of that same Cyrus and is even recorded to have lived in the first year of Darius.

End of Chapter 1

the Church which only revealed his own ignorance, as he tried to prove the evangelist Matthew guilty of error.

Verse 2. *"And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand."* The fact that Jehoiachim is recorded to have been given over shows that it was not a victory for the might of his enemies but rather it was of the will of the Lord. ". . .and 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 he conveyed them into the treasure house of his god" (Gen. 11). The land of Shinar is a region of Babylon in which the plain of Dura was located, and also the tower which those who had migrated from the East attempted to build up to heaven. From this circumstance and from the confusion of tongues the region received the name Babylon, which, translated into our language, means "confusion." At the same time it ought to be noted, by way of spiritual interpretation [*anagogen*], that the king of Babylon was not able to transport all of the vessels of God, and place them in the idol-house which he had built himself, but only a part of the vessels of God's house. By these vessels we are to understand the dogmas of truth. For if you go through all of the works of the philosophers, you will necessarily find in them some portion of the vessels of God. For example, you will find in Plato that God is the fashioner of the universe, in Zeno the chief of the Stoics, that there are inhabitants in the infernal regions and that souls are immortal, and that honor is the one (true) good. But because the philosophers combine truth with error and corrupt the good of nature with many evils, for that reason they are recorded to have captured only a portion of the vessels of God's house, and not all of them in their completeness and perfection.

Verse 3. *"And the king said to Ashpenaz the overseer of his eunuchs, that he should out of the number of the children of Israel and, of the royal seed and (the seed of) the rulers [tyrannorum, Jer.'s rendering of Heb. *part^emim*, "nobles"] bring in some young lads who were free from all blemish."* Instead of Ashpenaz ("Asphanez") I found *Abriesdri* written in the Vulgate [i.e., the LXX] edition. For the word *phorlhommin* which Theodotion uses, the Septuagint and Aquila translated "the chosen ones," whereas Symmachus rendered "Parthians," understanding it as the name of a nation instead of a common noun. This is in disagreement with the Hebrew edition as it is accurately read; I have translated it as "rulers," especially because it is preceded by the words "of the seed royal." From this passage the Hebrews think that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were eunuchs, thus fulfilling that prophecy which is spoken by Isaiah regarding Hezekiah: "And they shall take of thy seed and make eunuchs of them in the house of the king of Babylon" (Isa. 37: 7). If however they were of the seed royal, there is no doubt but what they were of the line of David. But perhaps the following words are opposed to this interpretation: "... lads, or youths, who were free from all blemish, in order that he might

teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans." Philo supposes that Chaldee is the same thing as the Hebrew language, because Abraham came from the Chaldeans. But if we accept this we must ask how the Hebrew lads could now be bidden to be taught a language which they already knew; unless, perchance, we should say, as some believe, that Abraham was acquainted with two languages.

Verse 7. *"And the overseer of the eunuchs imposed names upon them, calling Daniel Belteshazzar (Balthasar), and Hananiah Shadrach, and Mishael Meshach, and Azariah Abednego."* It was not only the overseer or master of the eunuchs (as others have rendered it, the "chief-eunuch") who changed the names of saints, but also Pharaoh called Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 41) Somtonphanec [Heb.: Zaphenath-paaneah], for neither of them wished them to have Jewish names in the land of captivity. Wherefore the prophet says in the Psalm: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps. 136:4). Furthermore the Lord Himself changes names benignly, and on the basis of events imposes names of special significance, so as to call Abram Abraham, and Sarai Sarah (Gen. 17). Also in the Gospel, the former Simon received the name of Peter (Mark 3), and the sons of Zebedee are called "sons of thunder"----which is not *boanerges*, as most people suppose, but is more correctly read *benereem* [a reading for which there is no manuscript support, but which would be the Hebrew for "sons of thunder"].

Verse 8. *"Daniel, however, purposed in his heart that he would not be defiled by food from the king's table, nor by the wine which he drank, and he asked the chief of the eunuchs that he might not be polluted."* He who would not eat or drink of the king's food or wine lest he be denied (especially if he should be aware that the wisdom and teaching of the Babylonians is mistaken), would never consent to utter what was wrong. On the contrary they [i.e., the Hebrew youths] speak it forth, not that they may follow it themselves, but in order to pass judgment upon it and refute it. Just as anyone would expose himself to ridicule if he being untrained in *mathematics* should desire to write in confutation of mathematicians, or, being ignorant of the teachings of philosophers should desire to write in opposition to philosophers. Hence they [i.e., the Hebrew youths] study the teaching of the Chaldeans with the same intention as Moses studied the wisdom of the Egyptians.

Verse 9. *"God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the prince of eunuchs. . . ."* He who was taken into captivity on account of the sins of his forebears received an immediate recompense for the magnitude of his own virtues. For he had purposed in his heart that he would not be denied by food from the king's table, and preferred humble fare to royal delicacies; therefore by the bounteous bestowal of the Lord he received favor and compassion in the sight of the prince of the eunuchs. By this we may understand that if ever under pressing circumstances holy men are loved by unbelievers, it is a matter of the mercy of God, not of the goodness of perverted men.

Verse 12. *"I beg thee, try us thy servants for ten days, and let pulse be given us to eat and water to drink."* His faith was so incredibly great that he not only promised he would be in good flesh by eating the humbler food, but he even set a time-limit. Therefore it was not a matter of temerity but of faith, for the sake of which he despised the sumptuous fare of the king.

Verse 17. *"But God gave these lads knowledge and learning in every book and branch of wisdom, and He gave to Daniel besides an understanding of all visions and dreams."* Note that God is said to have given the holy lads knowledge and learning in secular literature, in every book and branch of wisdom. Symmachus rendered this by "grammatical art," implying that they understood everything they read, and by the Spirit of God could make a judgment concerning the lore of the Chaldeans. But Daniel had an outstanding gift over and above the three lads, in that he could astutely discern the significance of visions and dreams in which things to come are shown forth by means of certain symbols and mysteries. Therefore that which others saw only in a shadowy appearance he could perceive clearly with the eyes of his understanding.

Verse 18. *"Therefore when the days had been completed at the end of which the king had bidden them to be presented to him, the chief of the eunuchs presented them in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar."* By the "completed days" understand the period of three years which the king had appointed, so that after they had been nourished and trained for three years, they should then stand in the presence of the king.