

Passing the Test

Daniel 1:17-21

TEXT:

“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. 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. 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. 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. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.”

NOTES:

- A. God gave Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah “learning and skill in all literature and wisdom.”
1. This passage itself demonstrates the wisdom in literature that God gave Daniel.
 - a. This text serves an important function of Scripture in demonstrating God’s faithfulness to those who are faithful to him.
 - b. On the other hand, this passage is very good literature.
 - 1) Throughout the rest of the Book, Daniel is going to be interpreting & receiving various visions & dreams.
 - 2) Before we ever encounter those dreams, Daniel informs us that God gave him understanding of such dreams.
 - 3) We typically don’t think of the Bible as “literature.”
 - a) We come to it, not to be intrigued by its characters, but to understand the Will of God for our lives. This is the way it should be.
 - b) However, the more I read Scripture, the more amazed I am at the way God had his authors write.
 - i. I really enjoy reading a good mystery & trying to figure out what character committed the crime.
 - ii. In order for a good mystery novel to work, the writer must spend a good amount of time in forming his/her characters & providing insight in to how they tick.
 - iii. Here, God inspires Daniel to do the same thing—to develop characters so that what we read later in the book makes good sense.
 2. Notice that God gave these youths skill in “literature and wisdom.”
 - a. There is a distinct difference between knowledge & wisdom.
 - b. “Knowledge” is a comprehension of facts & “wisdom” is knowing how to apply those facts.
 3. The ability God gave Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah may have been demonstrated in competitions with other youths, for such was common in that time period.
 4. Visions & dreams were often used by God in the Old Testament to demonstrate his will to his servants.
 - a. Jacob had a dream in which God promised to multiply his descendants (Gn 28:10-17).
 - b. Joseph is probably the most famous dreamer in the Old Testament—God informed him of his elevated position vis-à-vis his brothers & allowed him to interpret Pharaoh’s dream about the coming famine.
- B. The king found none among his sages like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah. Even Nebuchadnezzar could not escape the great things the Lord had given them.

- C. “Standing before the king” carries the connotation of serving in his court.
- D. Nebuchadnezzar found these four Hebrew youths “ten times” better than his own magicians & enchanters.
1. The “ten times” is certainly hyperbolic, but the point is quite evident:
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar found these Hebrews far better than those who were brought up on Babylonian wisdom to be magicians & enchanters.
 - b. Additionally, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream **before** the testing of which we read in this chapter.
 - 1) This testing took place “three years” after the youths arrived in Babylon (1:5).
 - 2) However, Daniel interpreted the famous dream “in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar” (2:1).
 - 3) That Daniel is able to interpret that troublesome dream before he’s finished with all his Babylonian education likely made quite an impression on Nebuchadnezzar.
 2. That Nebuchadnezzar found these four youths “ten times better” than his own magicians & enchanters was likely not lost on those magicians & enchanters.
 - a. “Certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of not bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar’s image (3:8). Although not certain, it’s certainly possible that the “certain Chaldeans” included some of Nebuchadnezzar’s sages.
 - b. Once Darius took over the kingdom, he “planned to set [Daniel] over the whole kingdom” (5:3).
 - 1) Others of Darius’ chief court devised the praying-to-Darius scheme to wrestle the kingdom away from Daniel.
 - 2) It’s possible that a long-seated hatred of Daniel brewed in the “presidents of satraps” of Darius because Daniel had far surpassed them in the days of Nebuchadnezzar.
- E. The Babylonians had many magicians, for they believed in a long line of good & evil spirits who could be controlled by magic.
1. God has long condemned means to gain revelation through wizardry.
 - a. “There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you” (Deut 18:10-12).
 - b. “As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).
 2. If God banned such practices in Israel & had banned those who practice them from the heavenly city, why did he allow Daniel to use them?
 - a. I don’t really believe Daniel did use these practices.
 - b. The text in Deuteronomy comes immediately after the passage where God promises to raise up another prophet like Moses.
 - 1) The people, in other words, didn’t need to turn to various magical means to learn from gods; the living God would reveal himself.
 - 2) In banning different magical arts, God’s basic message is: “You don’t need those forms to learn what the gods have to say. I will reveal myself to whom I will & you will have no problem knowing my will.”
 - c. In the case of Daniel, God sent the dreams to Nebuchadnezzar & Daniel as part of revelation.