



FAITH, FREEDOM, & FITNESS

DAILY BREAD

Friday, May 01

Daniel 1:3, 6-7

Then the king (Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon) ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility – young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace ...

Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Aeshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.



As competitive lifters, we train to increase the amount of weight we can lift in the three competitive events (squat, bench press, and deadlift). Secondary reasons include improving our overall health and, if we're honest, looking good. If we also prioritize gaining knowledge and wisdom as part of our daily habits, we would have been good candidates to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar's service.

During the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Israel, capturing many religious artifacts and prisoners. Some of those captives were chosen specifically for their value to the Babylonian Empire:

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Nebuchadnezzar wanted attractive, competent advisors. Most likely, he intended to mold these young men into Babylonian culture and use them to help control the newly conquered Israelites.

Only four of the children taken into Nebuchadnezzar's reeducation program are mentioned by name. There would have been others, but these are the only ones who factor directly into Daniel's story:

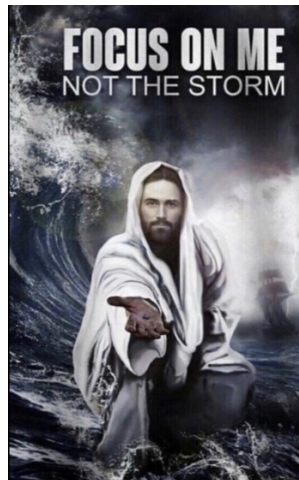
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These were the descendants of Jewish royalty taken, in part, so they could be molded into mediators between Israel and their Babylonian captors. These four boys are identified as members of the tribe of Judah, the same tribe as David and the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Each carries a birth name referring to the God of Israel, but their new masters will assign them names tied to Babylonian religion.



Scripture does not say how other Israelite captives responded to their new positions. These four captives, however, will demonstrate that names, themselves, do not define a person's destiny. They resisted the pressure to abandon their faith. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will become famous for their refusal to worship idols, even at the risk of their lives. Daniel will be renowned for righteousness despite living under several pagan regimes.

In Christ, Spero



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Saturday, May 02

Daniel 1:8, 15

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way ...

At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.



As competitive lifters, many of us adhere to a strict diet to help us recover from workouts and grow stronger. When I was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma last month, I did some research and began a “cancer-targeted,” organic diet. Initially, I lost ten pounds adjusting to the new foods and medications but am now slowly putting weight back on and feeling stronger in the gym. More importantly, the transition has drawn me closer to God as I put my trust in Him to help me “power through” the weekly treatments in preparation for the “Born Again” procedure.



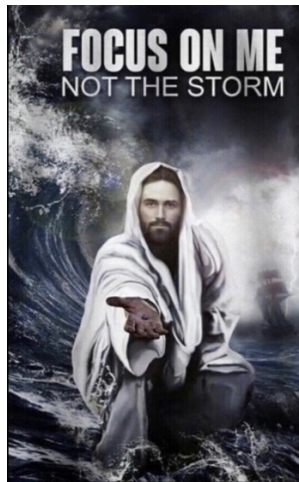
Daniel’s concern about being “defiled” by the king’s food might have been a matter of ceremonial cleanliness, or idolatry, or both. The pagan peoples of Babylon would have eaten unclean animals prohibited by the law given to Israel by Moses.

Daniel’s Babylonian manager, Ashpenaz, was concerned about different food affecting the health of the four captive Israelites. So, Daniel proposes a brief test, indicating whether they can maintain their condition while abstaining from the king’s food. Other recorded incidents also show that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to die rather than compromise their faith.

The ten-day test proved successful. Daniel and his three friends appeared healthier and more muscular than the other youths. Scripture does not intend this to endorse a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. Rather, the point is that God always honors those who honor Him by adhering to His Word. This reflects God's sovereign guidance, honoring Daniel's choice to avoid the unclean food prepared for a pagan king.

While obedience to the Lord may not cause us to look physically different, it will certainly make our lifestyle different from that of unbelievers.

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