

DANIEL 1



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Daniel 1

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Cover art: Rembrandt, *Daniel in the Lions' Den*

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Daniel 1: Introduction

Israel is carried away into captivity, and Nebuchadnezzar intends to make the most of it. He will Babylonize the best of the best of Israel, and thus further humiliate the people of God.

Well, that's what he thinks, at any rate. God has other plans, however. And central to those plans is Daniel.

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We hope you find this study of Hosea instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Carried Away

Introduction

The captivity of Judah in 586 BC was because of her sin. As a people, they had despised God and looked to pagan ways to meet their needs and satisfy their wants. They claimed to know Him, but it was clear they did not. They had neglected God's Law, though they continued going through the motions of worship. They listened to His prophets only as the prophets spoke words of comfort and convenience. And they banked on their kings and politicians to protect their freedoms. Ever since the days of Solomon, prophets like Asaph had warned of the compromises God's people were embracing. The people didn't listen then. Are we listening now?

Read [Psalm 74](#), a Psalm of Asaph.

Read Daniel 1.1, 2.

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

Think it Through

1. The people of Israel (the northern kingdom) had been carried away captive to Assyria in 740 BC. God warned Judah to repent, lest a similar fate should befall them. But the people of Judah (the southern kingdom) would not listen, and the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, and their being carried away to Babylon, were the result. The worst part of this catastrophe was what Israel's sin said to the world about God. How would you describe Nebuchadnezzar's attitude toward God, as it is suggested in these verses? How would you describe the world's attitude toward God today? Do we share some responsibility for this attitude? Explain.

2. Note the mention of "some of the articles of the house of God" also being carried away. We recall a similar incident in which articles related to God were carried away and brought into the house of a pagan deity. Look at 1 Samuel 5. What happened at that time? The Philistines got carried away with their "victory" over God, and it cost them severely. Now Nebuchadnezzar was similarly carried away. Do you suppose Daniel (we will assume he is the author of this book) remembered the incident in 1 Samuel 5? Daniel mentioned these articles here as a kind of foreshadowing of things to come (cf. Dan. 5.1-4). Daniel 1.1, 2, sad as these verses are, lay the foundation for the ultimate victory of the Lord over Babylon, Persia, and all other nations. Explain.

Meditate

"These words, 'and the Lord gave,' are written that no one, in reading the introduction to the book, may attribute their capture to the strength of the captors and the slackness of their chief. And it is well said 'with part,' for the deportation was for the correction, not the ruin, of the whole nation, that there might be no misapplication of the cause." *Hippolytus (fl. 222-245 AD)*

O God, how long will the adversary reproach?
Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Psalm 74.10

Whatever was written before time, Lord, is for our instruction (Rom. 15.4), and that includes the words of Asaph and Daniel. Help me to...

Pray

We do not see our signs;

There is no longer any prophet;
Nor *is there* any among us who knows how long.
O God, how long will the adversary reproach?
Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?
Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?
Take it out of Your bosom and destroy *them*.
For God *is* my King from of old,
Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Psalm 74.9-12

Psalm 74.10-14 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)
How long, O Lord, must they prevail and mock and spurn Your holy Name?
Why stay Your hand? Deploy it now, and bring Your foes to lasting shame!

Our God is King from long ago, Who works deliv'rance in the land;
He split the sea, He crushed His foes; against Him none can ever stand.

2 Leavening the Loaf

Introduction

Jesus used the metaphor of leaven to express the nature of the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 13.33). Leaven invades an essentially unpalatable mass of ingredients, wholly foreign in nature to itself, and, properly diffused and kneaded, works transforming effects on everything it touches, creating something wholesome and palatable and good. Enter Daniel and his friends into the waiting loaf of Nebuchadnezzar's court.

Read [Matthew 13.24-43](#).

Read *Daniel 1.3-7*.

³Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. ⁶Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

Think it Through

1. Let's try to understand Nebuchadnezzar's thinking here. Why would he want to bring smart, good-looking Hebrew princes into his royal court? Do you suppose he was thinking more about the good of his new captives, or was he primarily motivated for his own advantage? What did he hope to achieve as a result of this action? Meditate on Genesis 50.15-20. Can you identify any similarities between Joseph's situation and that into which Daniel and his friends were introduced? Do you suppose Daniel might have had Joseph's situation in mind as he entered this role?

2. Daniel mentions 8 criteria that were to be used in selecting those who would be prepared for service in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Can you identify them? Why would each of these be important to Nebuchadnezzar? Which of these criteria should be important to us as we prepare continually to serve the Lord in our own [Personal Mission Field](#)? Look back at verse 2: Do you suppose the Lord was also in this action on the part of Nebuchadnezzar, and in the choice of young men to fill these roles? Let's make one other observation: The chief of eunuchs gave new names to all four of these young men. Daniel's friends are consistently called by their new names, but Daniel uses his Hebrew name when he writes about himself. The Babylonians refer to him as Beltshazzar until Daniel 5, when, perhaps wearied by his repeatedly correcting him, they also call him by his Hebrew name. By chapter 6, he is only Daniel. What shall we make of this? Why isn't this book entitled Beltshazzar? Is there a principle for us to practice as we go into the unbelieving world?

Meditate

"It is 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 *Zaphenathpaneah*, for neither of them wished to have Jewish names in the land of captivity." *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD,
Like the rivers of water;
He turns it wherever He wishes. Proverbs 21.1

Daniel 1

O Lord, You have called me, and You are preparing me as leaven in the loaf of my Personal Mission Field. Today, let me bring the presence of Your Kingdom to...

Pray

Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;

Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

Do not forget the voice of Your enemies;

The tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

Psalm 74.22, 23

Psalm 74.22, 23 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)

Arise O God, and plead Your cause! See how the fools reproach Your Name.

Their voices quell, their uproar still, who Your majestic grace defame.

3 Set of the Soul

Introduction

Obedience to God begins within, with a set of the soul that desires above all else to please the Lord ([Ps. 119.112](#)). The heart is the heart of the matter, as Solomon knew, and Daniel made sure his heart was set just as it should be.

Read [Proverbs 4.20-27](#).

Read *Daniel 1.8, 9*.

⁸But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. ⁹Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.

Think it Through

1. Daniel believed that eating the king's cuisine would defile him, and he wasn't afraid to say so to the chief of the eunuchs. Why did he think this? Was there any risk involved in his refusing to eat what was offered? What does it mean to be defiled? How can we know when we have begun to be defiled? What kinds of things threaten to defile believers today?

2. Daniel "purposed in his heart" not to defile himself. The reflexive form of the Hebrew verb "defile himself" indicates that only he could do this; no one else could defile him. That being the case, Daniel fixed his soul – heart, mind, and conscience (will) – not to defile himself. How does Solomon counsel us to keep our soul in shape for obedience in Proverbs 4.20-27? Note also that, Daniel had prepared the way for this objection by finding favor with the chief of the eunuchs. God had done this (v. 9). But how do you suppose that happened? How should we seek to find favor with people ([Prov. 16.7](#); [1 Cor. 10.31-11.1](#))? Should we expect that God will help us in this? Explain.

Meditate

"By this we may understand that if ever under pressing circumstances holy people are loved by unbelievers, it is a matter of the mercy of God, not of the goodness of perverted people." *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

When a man's ways please the LORD,
He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Proverbs 16.7

Lord Jesus, I know I can serve You better if I set my soul for obedience, so today help me...

Pray

Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O LORD,
And *that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.
Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast!
Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.
Have respect to the covenant;
For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.
Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed!
Let the poor and needy praise Your name.

Psalm 74.18-21

Daniel 1

Psalm 74.18-21 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)
Remember this, O Lord, our God: a foolish people spurns Your Name;
Deliver not Your flock to them, nor leave Your holy ones to shame.

Your covenant recall, renew, for violence spreads throughout the earth;
The poor and needy rescue, Lord, and we shall sing Your matchless worth!

4 This is Only a Test

Introduction

The chief of the eunuchs is not surprisingly a little concerned about telling Nebuchadnezzar Daniel's objection to his "generous" plan. Takes a Babylonian to know one, I suppose. But Daniel – who may be anywhere from 12 to 16 years old or so – has a practical suggestion to allay his fears. He reminds me a bit of Gideon, seeking the Lord's will in a rather risky situation.

Read [Judges 6.36-40](#).

Read [Daniel 1.10-14](#).

¹⁰And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who *are* your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king." ¹¹So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." ¹⁴So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

Think it through

1. I don't sense that Daniel was testing God, to see if God wanted him to join this effort. Rather, I think Daniel was trying to balance his own objections with the understandable hesitation of the chief of eunuchs. Daniel might have simply given in to Nebuchadnezzar's plan, but he knew that would be to defile himself. Rather than just go-along-to-get-along, Daniel *proposed* a different tack, and a courageous one at that. How can you see the grace and wisdom of God at work in this situation, superintending and moving events forward? Is there wise counsel for us here in communicating our beliefs and worldview with those who do not know the Lord?

2. We've already mentioned that Daniel's choice of diets resonates with what he would have known from Proverbs and the prophet Ezekiel. But Daniel could not be sure what the outcome of this test would be. The consequences might not be as he hoped. Yet he was willing to take the risk, to do what he could to fulfill God's will for him ([Prov. 23.1-3](#); [Ezek. 4.9-13](#), [Jer. 29.7](#); [Prov. 15.1, 2](#)). Sometimes doing the right thing entails risk. We can't always know the outcome from the beginning; but we can always know what obedience to God requires in the moment. We know Daniel was familiar with the prophetic ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it's not unlikely he knew the Proverbs, too. What does this suggest about how to make wise decisions? Is this an example of Daniel, thinking with the mind of Christ ([1 Cor. 2.16](#))? Explain. From what we've seen so far in Daniel 1, how can you see that God is working in the midst of this very difficult situation?

Meditate

"...do not become a cause for scandal to those to whom you wish to set an example by encouragement and by proof of a good life." *Leander of Seville (545-600 AD)*

For the LORD gives wisdom;
From His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding... Proverbs 2.6

I need Your wisdom every day, O Lord, to guide and sustain me as I...

Pray

For God *is* my King from of old,

Working salvation in the midst of the earth...
Arise, O God, plead Your own cause...

Psalm 74.12, 22

Psalm 74.12-14, 22, 23 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)

Our God is King from long ago, Who works deliv'rance in the land;
He split the sea, He crushed His foes; against Him none can ever stand.

Arise O God, and plead Your cause! See how the fools reproach Your Name.
Their voices quell, their uproar still, who Your majestic grace defame.

5 Test Passed

Introduction

The ten days of probation pass, and Daniel and his friends come through with flying colors. Their success through this trial will open doors of opportunity for them, but will also bring them to more trials. We only advance in the Kingdom through trials, so we must neither fear nor try to avoid them, but through them follow the lead of saints like Daniel. Daniel and his friends proved the faithfulness of God for those who trust in Him. God never fails us when we take Him at His Word. We will always find Him faithful.

Read [Psalm 19.7-11](#); [Acts 14.21, 22](#).

Read *Daniel 1.15-17*.

¹⁵And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. ¹⁶Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. ¹⁷As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Think it Through

1. Daniel and his friends ate less, and less sumptuously, throughout their ten-day trial, than the other trainees in the program. But they fared better. Why? Is bodily health and wellbeing only a matter of physical things (food, exercise, etc.)? Explain. Their test passed, Daniel and his friends were allowed to follow the Lord in their diet. And in their obeying God, the steward, and even King Nebuchadnezzar, were constrained to obey Him as well. Meditate on [Psalm 81.13-16](#). How can you see the promise made here at work for Daniel and his friends? Is this promise still true today? Can you think of any applications of it we might claim?

2. Daniel and his friends excelled not only in physical wellbeing (v. 17). God gave them “knowledge and skill.” What’s the difference between these? What does it mean to have *skill* in literature, as opposed to mere *knowledge*? What about in wisdom? Since God gave knowledge and skill to them, we can assume that these two – knowledge and skill – are what God intends for us as disciples (*learners*). Why would each of these be important? Is learning complete without one or the other? Explain. Daniel and his friends learned literature and wisdom and much more (v. 20) because this was what their roles or *callings* required. What does your calling from the Lord require of you as a *learner*? We note also that God gave interpretation of visions and dreams to Daniel, but *only* to Daniel. That will come in handy, as we shall see.

Meditate

“Daniel had an outstanding gift over and above the three youths, 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.” *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth!
Sing out the honor of His name;
Make His praise glorious.
Say to God,
“How awesome are Your works!
Through the greatness of Your power
Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.
All the earth shall worship You
And sing praises to You;
They shall sing praises to Your name.” Psalm 66.1-4

Daniel 1

Lord, every day I face some test of whether I will obey You or follow the lead of the world. Help me always to obey, and let the world around me...

Pray

We do not see our signs;

There is no longer any prophet;

Nor *is there* any among us who knows how long.

O God, how long will the adversary reproach?

Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?

Take it out of Your bosom and destroy *them*.

For God *is* my King from of old,

Working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Psalm 74.9-12

Psalm 74.10-14 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)

How long, O Lord, must they prevail and mock and spurn Your holy Name?

Why stay Your hand? Deploy it now, and bring Your foes to lasting shame!

Our God is King from long ago, Who works deliv'rance in the land;

He split the sea, He crushed His foes; against Him none can ever stand.

6 Heads of the Class

Introduction

The test Daniel and his friends passed during the first ten days of their training laid a cornerstone for the rest of their preparation. At the end of the program, after three years of disciplined study (v. 5), they were heads of the class. And not merely heads of the class, they were better than all the king's existing advisors when it came to those matters of wisdom and understanding that mattered to Nebuchadnezzar. Not unlike Joseph, many years before, who was doubtless in Daniel's mind throughout this period of preparation. The early respect Daniel and his friends achieved would put them in good stead for what was to follow.

Review [Genesis 41](#).

Read Daniel 1.18-21.

¹⁸Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. ²⁰And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who *were* in all his realm. ²¹Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

Think it Through

1. What do you suppose it was like to be interviewed by the most powerful king in the world, a declared enemy of God and your people? How do you suppose Daniel and his friends maintained their composure and their wits? Meditate on Luke 12.11, 12. Does Jesus mean we don't need to prepare for such situations? When we face situations that can be intimidating or risky, *how* should we prepare?
2. Nebuchadnezzar probably didn't query them about everything they had studied and learned. What do you suppose were the subjects that mattered most to him? Again, the king was looking for *understanding* and *wisdom*. How are wisdom and understanding related? (It is interesting to note that, in the Hebrew, their relationship is suggested by the way the words are used together; a literal translation would be *wisdom of understanding*.) What are some of the things that are important to the people in your Personal Mission Field? Do you think it would be a good idea for you to know something about this, and to be able to talk with them about these things? If we want to serve people, like Daniel did, can we afford *not* to be informed about what matters to them? Explain.

Meditate

"By the 'completed days' understand the period of three years that 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." *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

"Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." Luke 12.11, 12

Lord, help me to love the people around me enough to...

Pray

Remember this, *that* the enemy has reproached, O LORD,
And *that* a foolish people has blasphemed Your name.

Daniel 1

Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast!
Do not forget the life of Your poor forever.
Have respect to the covenant;
For the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty.
Oh, do not let the oppressed return ashamed!
Let the poor and needy praise Your name.
Arise, O God, plead Your own cause;
Remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily.

Psalm 74.18-22

Psalm 74.18-21 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)
Remember this, O Lord, our God: a foolish people spurns Your Name;
Deliver not Your flock to them, nor leave Your holy ones to shame.

Your covenant recall, renew, for violence spreads throughout the earth;
The poor and needy rescue, Lord, and we shall sing Your matchless worth!

7 Behind the “Seens”

Introduction

Daniel 1 sets the stage for the rest of the book. It leads us with Israel into her captivity in Babylon, introduces us to the ways of the Babylonian royal court, and brings onto the stage the main players in this drama that will last until the days of King Cyrus, the servant of God (Is. 45.1-13). This is a time of judgment and trial, but it's also a time of God's caring and preparing His people for greater glory to come. Israel and the Babylonians see the events of captivity beginning to unfold. But behind the “seens,” God is at work, just as He always is, bringing His promises to fruition for His people.

Read [Isaiah 45.1-13](#).

Read and Meditate on [Daniel 1](#).

Think it Through

1. Describe Israel's situation at the end of Daniel 1. Recalling Psalm 137, how do you suppose most of the people felt about what was happening to them? On the other hand, what would have been the Babylonians' attitude toward this situation? Who seemed to have the upper hand here? Most of the people in captivity would not have been aware of the story that unfolded in Daniel 1. Even if they were, they would have seen this as simply one more humiliating development: The best and brightest of their youth, forced to serve in the royal court of their enemy. In what sense is it true that we can often be misled by the “seens” of life?
2. How many different ways is it suggested in Daniel 1 that God is still at work in Israel, willing and doing of His good pleasure ([Phil. 2.13](#))? Would the people of Israel have been encouraged to know this? *Should* they have known this? Why or why not? When the “seens” of life don't seem to be going our way, we should remind ourselves that they're not the whole story. Explain.

Meditate

“And so the God of all makes evident the foolishness, infirmity and loathsome ways of the world in order to put to shame its power and wisdom. People who care for bodily things and seek beauty, greatness and great bodily strength know nothing of divine wisdom but rather only a false and artificial sort of eloquence. And thus is the distance between humanity and God.” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3.1-3

Teach me, Lord, to focus not only on the “seens” of this life, but on the unseen things of Christ as well. Then I will...

Pray

Pray through [Psalm 74](#). Remember that this psalm was written during the reign of King Solomon, when Israel was a flourishing and powerful nation. But Asaph could see the compromises that were already beginning, and he knew where these would lead. His mind was filled with terror at the dissolution and judgment to come. But he also remembered to call upon God, Who brings such discipline upon His people, to restore His favor to them once again. Pray reflectively, thinking about the situation of God's people in our day, and letting Asaph's words guide you in seeking the Lord for revival, renewal, and awakening.

Psalm 74 (*Rockingham Old: O Lord Most High, With All My Heart*)

O Lord, why have You cast us off? Why does Your anger ever burn?
Remember now Your Church, O Lord, and to us let Your grace return.

Daniel 1

Turn now Your steps to this sad ruin; our foes have damaged all within.
They roar throughout Your meeting place and raise the banner of their sin.

The wicked wield their ax within and desecrate our walls around;
Defiling Your abiding-place, they burn Your temple to the ground.

Within their hearts they plot and scheme: "Now let us finally bring them down!"
Our signs and prophets all are gone; they burn our churches to the ground.

How long, O Lord, must they prevail and mock and spurn Your holy Name?
Why stay Your hand? Deploy it now, and bring Your foes to lasting shame!

Our God is King from long ago, Who works deliv'rance in the land;
He split the sea, He crushed His foes; against Him none can ever stand.

You opened the springs, fresh water flowed; to You belong both day and night.
You bound the seasons and the earth, and gave the sun its glorious light.

Remember this, O Lord, our God: a foolish people spurns Your Name;
Deliver not Your flock to them, nor leave Your holy ones to shame.

Your covenant recall, renew, for violence spreads throughout the earth;
The poor and needy rescue, Lord, and we shall sing Your matchless worth!

Arise O God, and plead Your cause! See how the fools reproach Your Name.
Their voices quell, their uproar still, who Your majestic grace defame.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. How was God at work in the deportation and captivity of His people?
2. Daniel reminds us that taking a stand for the Lord can entail a certain amount of risk. Explain. Is this true for you as well? In what ways?
3. From the beginning of the story, Daniel shows the power that comes from resting on God's Word. He also reminds us that we are a people not only of truth, but of grace as well. How can you see this?
4. Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are important indicators of learning. But the heart also plays a role in what we learn. How can you see this from Daniel's experience? What can we learn from Daniel about our calling to serve the people in our Personal Mission Field?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.