

Pulse and Self-Preservation in Daniel 1:12

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As prophesized by Jeremiah in 25:9-14, the time of the Babylonians lasted 70 years—from the fall of the Assyrians in 609 BC, until their own fall in 539 BC.² That time period was a rest for the land of the Israelites and surrounding areas, and a time to reaffirm faith in their God for the exiles. The prophet Daniel stands out among them. His writings from that time in exile left successive generations with questions that we struggle to answer even today. In one of his writings, Dan 1:12, Daniel requests “something sown,” *hazzêrō ‘îm* (הַזְרִיעִים), to nourish himself, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, for a period of 10 days.³ The question is: Why? And, what could *hazzêrō ‘îm* possibly mean to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah?

Although the text seems to directly answer these questions, it does not. And while 48 out of 56 Bibles reviewed render *hazzêrō ‘îm* as “vegetables,” and only eight render it as “pulse,” I propose that it is highly unlikely that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah requested “vegetables” to sustain them for 10 long days when all they had to do was to eat them from the food already prepared for them.

Some scholars propose that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah requested vegetables

¹ I call myself the writer of this work, not the Author because God, the true Author, created all of this long before God ordained me to write it down. The more I read and study the Bible, the more I am amazed at this work that spans centuries and multiple writers, yet clearly has one Author/Editor.

² From the beginning of their time in exile until the end of the Babylonian empire, 70 years had not passed, but Daniel came to understand “*by books* the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the *desolations* of Jerusalem” (Dan 9:2 KJV, emphasis mine). Once Daniel understood how to calculate the number of years, he began to pray and fast for God to take them back.

³ James Strong, “The New Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible,” in *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, red letter ed.* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 78-79. See also Frances Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 282-283; and, William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 92-93.

as a form of resistance to Babylonian domination, adherence to Torah food laws, or possibly as a way to prove the superiority of God.⁴ However, based on a review of *hazzêrô 'îm*, Levitical dietary restrictions, and Israelite biblical history, I propose that “vegetables” is not an adequate translation of *hazzêrô 'îm*, and that none of the previously mentioned explanations above satisfactorily answers the question of why Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah asked for “vegetables” when, as previously stated, all they had to do was to pick them from the king’s allotment of food given to them.

In this paper, I argue that “pulse” makes for a better translation of the text, and that their request had more to do with self-preservation and their faith in God than anything else. To prove this I review Daniel 1 using the following headers: A Review of vv. 1-11; An Analysis of the Word *Hazzêrô 'îm*; Daniel’s Refusal to Yitgā'al (יִתְגַּאֵל); Why Hazzêrô 'îm?; and, My Final Thoughts.

A Review of vv. 1-11

Daniel 1:3 establishes that those taken in captivity have become stationary. Their long walk has ended, and they are preparing for what comes next. However, before that walk ended, it is evident that during that walk, they were observed by the men of Nebuchadnezzar. That is evident because by the time they reached the end of their journey to Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom, Daniel recorded himself, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah as being chosen for Nebuchadnezzar’s school without ceremony.⁵

⁴ Among others, see Ronald W. Pierce, *Daniel*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 17-19; John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 19-20; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 52-53; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “The Book of Daniel: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol 7 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 40, 42 (excursus). 44-45; and, Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 46, 48, 54-55.

⁵ For a different perspective, see J. Vernon McGee, *Daniel*, Thru the Bible Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 18; and, Smith-Christopher, “The Book of Daniel,” 39.

Along the way to Babylonia, it had been observed that they were individuals “in whom [there was] no blemish ... [they were] well favoured, ... skilful in all wisdom, ... cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such [that had the] ability in them to stand in the king's palace” (v. 4 KJV).⁶ In addition to all of that, they were not so old that they could not be taught the ways and language of the Chaldeans.

Only by observing those taken in captivity could anyone form such conclusions about the individuals before they reached the end of their journey. I suggest that this happened on the way, or while they were in Jerusalem, and not once they arrived there because they were not the first captives taken from their homeland and escorted to the area of ancient Mesopotamia.⁷ In other words, to avoid chaos that could benefit the captives, there had to be a plan in place to make use of them before they reached their final destination.

This provides a reason why Daniel did not make his request to be excused from eating of the king's table before he made it in v. 8. Prior to that time, he most likely had no need to make such a request because they all probably ate whatever kosher foods the earth provided for their meals as they made their way to Babylonia. It could be assumed that they thought, as captives, that that would continue to be the case.

While the king's men knew what would happen to each individual once they arrived in Babylonia, it is apparent that the captives had no idea what their fate was to be. First, they were

⁶ As others have pointed out, here Daniel uses terminology associated with the priesthood and sacrificial system of Israel. His use of this wording indicates that he probably had more than just a passing familiarity with Israel's priesthood and laws. Or, maybe he was leaving a clue in the text that they were “eunuch,” as Isa 39:7 prophesied, but were such that remain whole (officers), without blemish as Lev 20 and 21 specified priests and sacrifices must be. See, for example, Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, The New American Commentary 18 (Brentwood, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 60-61; and, Joe M. Sprinkle, *Daniel*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 52-53.

⁷ See, for example, 2 Chr 33:11; A. H. Sayce, “The Book of Hosea in the Light of Assyrian Research,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 1, no. 2 (1889): 167; and, Philippe Clancier, and Ethan Rundell, “Warlike Men and Invisible Women: How Scribes in the Ancient Near East Represented Warfare.” *Clio* (English Ed.), no. 39 (2014): 27-31.

separated from most of the group. Next, they were given new names. Then, Daniel's group was told that they would be given the privilege of eating whatever the king ate for the next three years while they prepared themselves to go before the king. The eating of pagan food was something that Daniel was not prepared to do—especially not for three long years—and so he approached his caretaker, Ashpenaz, and pushed back against doing so (*see* v. 8).

Even though God had given Daniel favor in Ashpenaz's sight, he still said no to Daniel's request to be excused from eating and drinking of the king's table. Ashpenaz's refusal may have prompted Daniel to seek out the help of his roommates, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They decided to stand with him. Daniel's primary concern became their primary concern—they, too, did not want to become defiled.

When Daniel brought Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into the picture, and approached Ashpenaz for a second time with the same request, it allowed Ashpenaz to gauge Daniel's sincerity and persistence, but he still was not convinced, and this time he gave Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah a reason why by way of an (inferred) apology⁸—even though he, Ashpenaz, was just doing his job and owed them nothing: Daniel's request could result in him losing his life if he and his friends ended up looking physically worse than others of their "sort" (v. 10 KJV).⁹

However, Daniel's second request to Ashpenaz, with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah at

⁸ Verses 8 and 9 set the stage for what Ashpenaz does in v. 10. There is a tension in v. 8 that comes from Daniel. However, God gave Daniel favor with Ashpenaz in v. 9, and that helps to alleviate that tension some. As the head official, Ashpenaz is above Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore, he owes them nothing, yet in v. 10 Daniel records Ashpenaz giving them a reason as to why he could not help them. Ashpenaz holds the power here. As such, he could have simply said "no," and left it at that—as he apparently (and abruptly) did in v. 8. The fact that he offered them a reason as to why he could not help them means that he felt the need to explain himself, which implies that he might have felt regret for not being able to help them. Daniel does not record Ashpenaz preceding his response in v. 10 with, "I'm sorry, but," or "I wish I could, but," or "I apologize, but," or any similar text; however, because of the tension in v. 8, and Daniel's acknowledgment of favor in v.9, it could be said that elements of an apology from Ashpenaz are present in v. 10: an expression of regret, and a *reason* (justification) *for* that regret.

⁹ Note that the singular "he" in reference to Daniel in v. 8, and the plural "faces" in v. 10 hint that Daniel made an initial request to Ashpenaz on his own, followed by a second request with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah at his side.

his side, may have prompted Ashpenaz to remove himself from direct communication with Daniel, and place a steward, called “Melzar” (v. 11 KJV),¹⁰ over him, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in his stead. By placing Melzar over them, someone Ashpenaz probably trusted, he could give the daily portion of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to Melzar, the steward. Whatever happened to it after that was between Melzar, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. As Goldingay writes, Ashpenaz’s reply in v. 10 “need not constitute a refusal: it raises a problem, but leaves open the possibility of agreeing to Daniel’s request if the problem can be overcome. Its implication then is, ‘Yes, if it doesn’t involve me and if it doesn’t make the king ask questions.’”¹¹

Nevertheless, Melzar must have shown some hesitancy to participating in Daniel’s request even though his boss, Ashpenaz, would be aware of what was going on. However, Daniel got Melzar’s buy-in by proposing a 10-day test. At the end of that time limit, Melzar would gauge the appearances of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. No one with any significance would see them within that time period, and if the test failed, no one would be any the wiser because what they were doing was, apparently, done in private.¹² And, if Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah failed the test they would have the remainder of the three years to fatten up from eating of the king’s table. While we do not know Melzar’s motivation for helping Daniel, it could be deduced from the text that one reason, as others have suggested, might have been because he could take the food and wine for himself.¹³ He could, for example, distribute it to, trusted, family and friends during the 10-day test period.

¹⁰ Josephus notes that the steward’s name was Arioch. See Josephus, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, rev. and exp. ed., trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 350.

¹¹ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 19.

¹² See Longman III, *Daniel*, 52-53; Pierce, *Daniel*, 18; and, William B. Nelson, *Daniel*, Understanding the Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 64-65.

¹³ See Longman III, *Daniel*, 54; and, Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 58.

An Analysis of the Word *Hazzêrō'îm*

This brings us to what Daniel requested they be given in v. 12 instead of the king's food: *hazzêrō'îm* (הַזְּרִיעִים)—the word that the King James Version translates as “pulse” while the majority of other versions render *hazzêrō'îm* as “vegetables.” The root of the word, as a noun, refers to either the seed of a plant, or the seed of a human as in an embryo or those yet to be conceived as descendants. In both cases, the thing to note is that “seed” refers to something undeveloped, and not to something fully developed, such as ripe vegetables.¹⁴

In addition, *hazzêrō'îm* could hardly mean “some vegetables” because the root is preceded by the definite article. That would indicate that Daniel was referring to a specific type of food, and that would be dry, edible seeds, pulse. This is important to note because, according to Levitical dietary law, dry planting seeds (זֶרַע, *zera'*) could not become unclean even if they fell on a “carcase” (Lev 11:37-38 KJV).¹⁵ Also, note that *hazzêrō'îm* (הַזְּרִיעִים) and *zera'* (זֶרַע) share the same root. So, more likely than not, Daniel was referring to pulse, and not ripe vegetables. However, as some scholars have pointed out, even if *hazzêrō'îm* did refer to ripe vegetables, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah could have simply picked them from the food they were already provided, unless their primary objection was the fact that food from the king's table carried the risk of having been sacrificed to Babylonian gods, and/or the food selection went against Levitical food laws.¹⁶

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the verb forms usually refer to blood being sprinkled, or scattered onto something.

¹⁵ On this point, LaCocque agrees with Ginsberg who also notices the value of *hazzêrō'îm* in relation to Lev 11:37-38. See André LaCocque, *The Book of Daniel*, trans. David Pellauer, English ed. rev. André LaCocque (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1976), 31; and, H. L. Ginsberg, “The Composition of the Book of Daniel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 4, no. 3 (1954): 256, where Ginsberg writes that “the great merit of grain ... is simply that it does not become unclean by contact with the unclean so long as it is kept dry.” In other words, it is impossible to become defiled by eating dry *hazzêrō'îm* that has come in contact with anything unclean.

¹⁶ See Lev 7:22-27 concerning the fat of certain animals, and blood. See also McGee, *Daniel*, 20; and, LaCocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 30.

Even so, as others have noted, those reasons for their refusal of the food do not explain their refusal of the wine. As Smith-Christopher writes, “the consumption of wine is clearly not forbidden in levitical [*sic*] purity laws.”¹⁷ However, it has been proposed that their refusal of the wine could be linked to them having taken Nazarite vows.¹⁸ The Nazarite position, however, seems unlikely because Daniel gives no indication that they are such, and besides that, they have no way to complete a Nazarite vow in Babylonia.

Daniel’s Refusal to *Yitgā’al* (יִתְגַּאֵל)

Therefore, in light of Daniel’s refusal of both food and wine, the word “defile” must be explored in order to determine why they requested *hazzêrō’îm*. The word that Daniel uses in v. 8 that has been translated as “would defile himself,” *yitgā’al* (יִתְגַּאֵל), has a root that, depending on usage, can be translated negatively as “defile” or positively as “redeem.” Each of the 11 cases of it being translated as “defile” is associated in some way with blood, or the idea of blood through sacrifice, or through an unholy event such as described in Zeph 3:1-3 where the idea of wolves not leaving a bone till morning alludes to blood being spilled.

In addition, the negative, “defile,” meaning does not come into usage before Isaiah where it carries a meaning opposite of the positive “redeemed.” The idea of “self” is associated with “defiled,” while God is associated with “redeemed.” To be “defiled” is to not be “redeemed” because they are opposite states of being with God, and as such, both cannot be true at the same time. Either you redeem yourself—as each of the 11 “defile” instances suggest—or God redeems

¹⁷ Smith-Christopher, “The Book of Daniel,” 40. See also Miller, *Daniel*, 67; Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 57; and, Lucas, *Daniel*, 54.

¹⁸ See “Nazarites,” McGee, *Daniel*, 20; “Nazirite,” Longman III, *Daniel*, 52; and, “Nazarite,” Lucas, *Daniel*, 54.

you.¹⁹ If you redeem yourself, God does not.²⁰ If Daniel knew of Isaiah's usage of "defile," in 59:1-3 (and 63:3-4 where Isaiah uses the negative and then the positive meaning) that would have been enough to remind anyone of similar wording used in Lev 17:7 and 10-14 (and 7:27) concerning blood and being cut off from God.

Isaiah 59:1-3 KJV

1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:
2 **But** *your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*
3 For **your hands** are **defiled with blood**, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

Lev 17:7, and 10-14 KJV

7 And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring. This shall be a statute for ever unto them throughout their generations.
10 And whatsoever man [יִשְׂרָאֵלִי (ʾisra'ēlī)] there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; *I will even set* [וְנָתַתִּי (vənatatti)] *my face against that soul* [בַּנֶּפֶשׁ (bənnepēš)] *that eateth blood, and will cut him off* [וְהִכְרַתִּי (vəhikratti)] *from among his people"* (KJV, emphasis mine).
11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.
12 Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood.
13 And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood thereof, and cover it with dust.
14 For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.

Daniels's natural response to hearing about the juicy meat still dripping with blood would have been to recall Lev 17:7 and 10-14. However, instead of using text such as, "the place where

¹⁹ Interestingly, along with Isa 63:3-4, this brings to mind the words "physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4:23 KJV). In addition, *see also* Matt 27:42-43, and Ps 22:7-8.

²⁰ This is the Christian understanding of Paul in Romans 8:39. Nothing can remove you from the hand of God except you, yourself.

it is written ...” in his writing, Daniel seems to follow Isaiah and use one word, the negative of redeemed, to immediately convey the seriousness of the situation to his readers.

Daniel’s primary concern, therefore, was not exchanging one food item for another. His primary concern, as he wrote, was that he did not want to become defiled, which, at this point in his life, could only happen through the consumption of blood.²¹ Put another way, he did not want to become someone God had set God’s face against and cut off because he had eaten blood (*see* Lev 17:10; Deut. 12:16, and 23-25). Daniel’s choice of words in v. 8 hint that the food they were to consume probably had blood still visible, or was known to have blood still visible, in the cooked meat.²² But, that’s not the end of the story.

In regard to Daniel not wanting to defile himself—cut himself off from God—the words translated as “against that soul” in the above passage, Lev 17:10, need to be noted because the writer of Leviticus could have used the word for man again in this passage, but instead the writer chose to use the same word (*nephesh*, נֶפֶשׁ) that is used in Gen 35:18 to describe Rachel’s departure from her earthly body, meaning her body died, but her soul did not. The implication being that her soul would continue to exist beyond her dead body because her *nephesh* “departs” (comes out of

²¹ At this point in his life, Daniel could not defile himself with any of the following, and probably would not have been involved with any of them even in his homeland: Lev 20:2-5 concerns God cutting off from the people and God setting God’s face against the man who offers his children to Molech; Lev 20:6 concerns God cutting off from the people and God setting God’s face against the soul who turns to mediums and familiar spirits instead of God; Lev 22:3 warns against unclean priests participating in sacrifices while unclean, God will cut that soul off from God’s presence (face); and, Lev 23:29-30 concerns the Day of Atonement, and warns against doing work on that day *and* not being afflicted in their souls—the soul that does work, and is not afflicted in their soul, will be cut off from the people *and* God will destroy that soul. In addition, see the chiasmic structure formed between Gen 17:14 and Num 15:30-31 both of which concern sinning on purpose. The scriptures to note that appear between them are Ex 12:15 and 19, 30:33, 31:14; Lev 7:20-21, 7:25, 17:4 and 9, 19:8, 26:22.

²² In regard to the “or was known to have blood still visible” comment above, meaning they have not yet been presented with the actual meat, *see* v. 5, which seems like it should follow v. 7 because it interrupts the flow between v. 4 and vv. 6-7. In addition to that, v. 5 begins with “and,” and v. 8 begins with a contrast to the “and”—“but.” The “and” that begins v.5 continues the thought in v. 7 concerning “what else happened” to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So, at this point in the story, they have only been “appointed” a portion of the king’s meat and wine. They probably have not actually been presented with any of it yet beyond a description that was meant to wet the appetite concerning the menu of bloody meat. The “but” in v.8 pushes back against the text that follows the “and” in v. 5. This creates tension in v. 8 that is palatable.

her), it does not end.²³ Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah may have had a similar understanding of *nephesh* as being the part of you that continues after the body's death.²⁴

If that is so, then to the Jew Daniel, it was probably obvious that the king's meat was not kosher, and would defile him in a way that would permanently separate his *nephesh* from God—in this life and in the one to come, all while in a foreign land.²⁵ This is not something that Daniel could “take or leave.” As previously noted, it can be gauged from the language Daniel uses in 1:4 that he has more than a passing familiarity with the priesthood (*see* footnote 6). If Daniel had been a priest in training, or a student at the school of the prophets when he was taken, then this question about defilement is of utmost importance to Daniel, especially since his language seems deliberate throughout the book.²⁶ The question, then, as Lucas writes is, “can a Jew function successfully as

²³ *Nephesh*, for me, myself, is not easily grasped in biblical Hebrew because of its development and evolution through the biblical texts. However, for detailed discussions, *see*, for example, W.E. Staples, “The ‘Soul’ in the Old Testament,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 44, no. 3 (1928), 145–76; and, Daniel Lys, “The Israelite Soul According to the LXX,” *Vetus Testamentum* 16, no. 2 (1966), 181–228. Staples and Lys analyze *nephesh* in the biblical texts/LXX as eventually coming to have the understanding that the *nephesh* did not continue beyond death. As Staples writes, “when an individual died he became a dead *nephesh*” (Staples, “The ‘Soul’ in the Old Testament,” 175). Likewise, Lys writes, “*nephesh* does not provide any possibility for the continuity of individual existence beyond the absolute discontinuity of death” (Lys, “The Israelite Soul According to the LLX,” 183). However, in opposition to Lys and Staples, Rev 20:4 comes to mind where John provides a concept of *nephesh* (the *psuchê*) as being something unique to the individual that continues beyond the death of the body, and which can be cast into the Lake of Fire. *See*, for example, Mitchell, Diana K. “Observations of the Final Judgment in Revelation 20” (Paper on Academia Website, 2024), 1-6. In addition, 1 Kings 17:21-22 demonstrates that the *nephesh* can depart from, and return to, the physical body. Also, while 2 Sam 12:16-23 does not mention *nephesh*, it does present the idea of *nephesh* as being something unique to the individual that is recognizable as having belonged to that individual before and after the death of that individual's physical body. Even today, we have an understanding of *nephesh* as being something special that continues beyond death. For example, Air Traffic Controllers used to use the term “souls on board” (nowadays “people on board” is mostly used) when they referred to the number of people on a downed air craft because to the FAA every person on board an aircraft is “more than statistics,” (*quoted from* “Mystery of ‘Souls on Board, The,’” (Article on NATCA Website, 2016). *See also* Mark Finlay, “Why Are People Onboard Aircraft Referred To As ‘Souls’ In ATC Communications?” (Article on Simply Flying Website, 2023); and, Jack Herstam, “The Reason Airplane Passengers Are Called ‘Souls’ Onboard,” (Article on Simply Flying Website, 2023). In addition, *see* Matt 16:24-26, and Mark 8:34-38 for a Christian perspective.

²⁴ *See also* Num 23:10 for another example. Here Balaam requests that his *last end*, his *nephesh* in other words, be like the one he is speaking about in v. 9, Jesus, of whom Balaam speaks prophetically. Jesus' *last end* was to rise from physical death to life eternal.

²⁵ *See* Gen 9:4; Deut 12:23-25; Lev 7:26-27, 17:4, 7, and 10-16; and, Isa 59:1-3.

²⁶ In regard to Daniel's deliberate use of language, consider the pattern of his usage in the following texts: 1:2 (Strong's 5414 God gave), 1:7 (7760 Ashpenaz put/assigned), 1:8 (7760 Daniel put/determined), 1:9 (5414 God gave), 1:12

a courtier to a pagan king and still remain loyal to the God of Israel?”²⁷

The longer they were in Babylonia, the higher the probability that they would either consume unclean animals listed in Leviticus 11 and thereby become unclean, or worse, become defiled, separated from God, after eating meat with blood still in it. This is an important consideration because with the exception of the post-exilic texts of Ezra 2:62-63, and Neh 7:64-65, which would not be fulfilled until Jesus, *there were no Levitical remedies to fix God setting God's face against you and cutting you off*—unlike the remedy to fix becoming unclean (*see* Leviticus 11-15 in the Hebrew for examples).²⁸ This distinction between defile and unclean must be made in order to understand the gravity of the situation from Daniel's, devout, point of view, which can be observed in how he uses wording such as his “gave” texts.

Based on those texts, it could be said that he had an understanding and relationship with God to the point that God gave him favor even with someone in Ashpenaz's position. In addition, Daniel's “gave” statements not only point out that he knew it was God who had brought them to Babylonia, but also that, despite how he might have felt in 1:8, neither Ashpenaz, nor Nebuchadnezzar were to blame for his current predicament.

Therefore, the thought of dying separated from God, whom he had a relationship with, would have made Daniel's request an urgent one for him to resolve sooner rather than later.²⁹ In less than one day, they had separated him from most of the other Jews, taken his name, his clothes,

(5414 give us), 1:16 (5414 Melzar gave), 1:17 (5414 God gave). From the beginning, to the middle, to the end of Daniel 1, “God gave.”

²⁷ Lucas, *Daniel*, 50.

²⁸ Even so, the mercy and goodness of God cannot be discounted. *See* Jer18:8-10, Mal 3:7, Zech 1:3, and Ezek 37.

²⁹ Daniel's fear of being separated from God before and after death mirrors the Christian fear of hearing Matt 7:21-23 and 25:31-46 after death. For Daniel to eat the food of the king's table, assuming it contained visible blood, would have been, for any Jew, a denial of God. It was something Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refused to do even after their schooling in all things Babylonian. *See* Dan 3, and 6.

and now they wanted to separate him from God when dinner was served where he would have the privilege and high honor of eating from the king's pagan table.³⁰

For Daniel, this appears to have been where he drew the line. The tension in v. 8 is palatable. Even though he believes the evidence supports a second century writing of Daniel, LaCocque hits the nail on the head when he writes, “notice the force of the term used in Dan. [sic] 1:8: יתגאל which indicates an almost physical repulsion.”³¹ Likewise, Nelson, too, notices this tension when he writes that the verb Daniel uses at this point in the story, “is the same word rendered ‘gave’ in the previous verse. The root meaning is ‘place’ or ‘put.’ The chief official *put* names to them (1:7). In contrast, Daniel *put* upon his heart that he would not defile himself (1:8).”³² For more in regard to this tension *see* footnote 22.

Why Hazzêrō‘îm?

To keep from being defiled, separated from God, too, Daniel had to pray and fast as he, more than likely, was accustomed to doing.³³ However, if he did that, he would have to ask to be excused from consuming his portion of the king's food *and wine* for, perhaps, an indeterminate amount of time. In addition to that possibly leaving Daniel looking worse than the others of his sort, Ashpenaz probably also reckoned that excusing Daniel would leave a large, telltale, portion

³⁰ While Josephus writes that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were kin to Zedekiah, it is interesting to note that the book of Daniel does not record genealogies for them. *See* Josephus, 349. If Daniel were of the royal seed, and orphaned, perhaps having his request granted was all the more important to him. His parents could not return to him, but he could go to them only if he were not separated from God. David presents this understanding of death and *nephesh* in 2 Sam 12:16-23.

³¹ LaCocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 30.

³² Nelson, *Daniel*, 63-64.

³³ Praying and fasting were habits of Daniel. “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans” (v. 9:1 KJV), Daniel came to understand “by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (v. 9:2 KJV), and so Daniel “set [his] face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (v. 9:3 KJV) for God to forgive God's people and accept them back. He also fasted for “three full weeks” (v. 10:2-3 KJV) for understanding of a vision that greatly troubled him.

of food and wine unconsumed each day—especially if that were multiplied by four—and that could prompt questions from the wrong people. These young men were supposed to be learning the ways of the Chaldeans, not clinging to their past lives. As McGee writes, they were now “supposed to eat like Babylonians, dress like Babylonians, and think like Babylonians.”³⁴

As the middle-man, Melzar could remove the food, but in exchange they, apparently, had to satisfy him that they were not going to starve to death. Hence the compromise of the pulse and the limited time period. Before Melzar, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah entered the picture, there is no indication that Daniel gave Ashpenaz any indication of how long he would fast, or that he would eat anything during the fast. According to the text, Daniel simply requested to not defile himself. That Daniel had in mind of fasting is only implied in v. 8 because later, in v. 12, he asks for *hazzêrô'im* to replace the king's food and wine instead of simply requesting to not defile himself.

As their steward, the pulse, or seeds, was something Melzar could carry with him, undetected, and give to them when he took the food and wine to their room. He could exchange their allotted food then for the pulse. In regard to the time limit, it could be that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah settled on 10 days because 10 commandments were received from God by Moses for the people before they entered their own, but also foreign, land.

Therefore, with this in mind, the 10-day time limit might also indicate that they have only heard about food from the king's table at v. 8, as in it being a future event to look forward to. They are still in the wilderness at this point in the story.³⁵ Ten days would demonstrate to God their determination and seriousness to keep God's commandments in their current foreign land, and trust

³⁴ McGee, *Daniel*, 19.

³⁵ A comparison between Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and the story of Caleb and the Hebrews in Num 13 before they entered the promised land comes to mind. Caleb's faith in God highlights their faith in God.

only God for their provisions.

In other words, their request for “pulse” from Melzar was a compromise for the sake of preserving their relationship with God, and thereby preserving their *nephesh* beyond their earthly existence. It also turned out to be a demonstration of their faith in God as opposed to strictly being a form of resistance to Babylonian domination, adherence to Torah food laws, or as a way to prove the superiority of God. These external things mattered, but they were irrelevant to the internal issue of defilement.

While it might sound selfish of them when said this way, it nonetheless remains the most likely answer as to why they requested pulse and what it meant to them: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were completely focused on themselves and their relationship with God. They did not want God to set God’s face against their *nephesh*, and die separated from God. They needed God to tell them how to proceed, and the only way for them to hear God clearly was for them to fast and pray. Requesting *hazzêrô’îm* to replace food from the king’s table was simply an acceptable compromise to achieve that end goal. In other words, asking for and accepting *hazzêrô’îm* meant that they could fast and pray to God in a private and undetectable way.

And, in the end, their fast made an impression on Ashpenaz and on Melzar, who noticed that they “appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat” (v. 15 KJV). This allowed Ashpenaz and Melzar to, with all confidence, for example, substitute their portion from the king’s table with kosher foods without the fear of losing their lives.³⁶

³⁶ As a side note, this could have prompted Ashpenaz or Melzar to seek out the services of Jewish women to prepare their kosher food. Consider that they were in a closed environment, yet Ezekiel possibly knows of Daniel as a great man of God (see Ezek 14:14, 14:20, 28:3). The only way for that to happen would have been for someone with access to Daniel to tell him about the young man who had fasted for God. The Jews were captives, but they were able to maintain community as Ezekiel, Ezra, and Nehemiah prove. See also, Clancier, and Rundell, “Warlike Men and Invisible Women”: 29, and 31.

The full proof for Ashpenaz and Melzar that they could do this may have come when Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah returned to Melzar his pulse. They had no need for it, and giving it back to Melzar would have provided him with tangible proof that he would not lose his life helping Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In other words, it does not stand to reason that if, from Melzar's natural point of view, he had simply observed that they were healthier and fatter, *ūbārî'ê* (וְבָרִי'עַ), after 10 days of pulse that he would continue to allow them to consume pulse without being provided a supernatural reason to do so because eating only pulse for 10 days does not lead to a "fatter in flesh" appearance in the natural.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah set out to seek God's counsel in order to not defile themselves, or put another way, they did not want to become separated from God or lose who they were as Jews in Babylonia. God had brought their ancestors out of the land of Egypt, taken them through the Red Sea as if on dry ground, given them a unique way to live with the Ten Commandments and Torah as their daily guide, set them up in their promised land, and defeated their enemies through one after God's own heart, their greatest king, David. With his "gave" statements, Daniel attests to the fact that he knows that it was also God who brought them to the land of the Babylonians.³⁷ Thus, as Longman writes, "in spite of present appearances, God is in control."³⁸

Therefore, God would have to have had a plan to keep them while they were there so that they would not become defiled, permanently separated from God. Seeking God's face through fasting allowed them to connect with God and tap into wisdom and understanding beyond their own. And no doubt God also responded to their concerns much like Jesus did in Matt 15:11-20

³⁷ See Dan 1:2, 1:9 and 1:17.

³⁸ Longman III, *Daniel*, 42.

when he explained what truly defiles a person.

The laws that Moses had given to them were meant to separate and define them as the peculiar people of God through whom Messiah would come.³⁹ Daniel took those laws seriously, and as Sprinkle writes, “Daniel knew that to compromise even in the area of diet was spiritually detrimental.”⁴⁰ By placing the primary law of God first, they stayed connected with God (*see* Deut 6:4-5 and Mark 12:28-34, Matt 22:34-40, Luke 10:25-28). And that showed in what God gave them, and in how they treated others, like when they took into consideration the objections of Ashpenaz and Melzar and placed a limit on the number of days that they fasted, and like when they suggested that pulse be given to them in order to ease any concerns that they would starve to death if they ate nothing—which would have left Ashpenaz and Melzar to explain to Nebuchadnezzar how something like that could have happened on their watch.

As a result, in addition to appearing to be in better health and fatter than all the others of their sort at the end of their 10-day fast, “God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel [their ring leader] had understanding in all visions and dreams” given to him as well (v. 17 KJV). And, as if in honor of their 10-day fast to honor God’s Ten Commandments, God also made them 10 times better than all in Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom. That was proven out at the end of the three years when they went before Nebuchadnezzar and he found them “ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (v. 20 KJV). But, as McGee points out, “it all began in the heart of Daniel.”⁴¹

³⁹ Those laws still matter even today because now we understand that disease can be transmitted through blood, and we understand the risks of not thoroughly cooking some meats.

⁴⁰ Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 57.

⁴¹ McGee, *Daniel*, 22.

My Final Thoughts

The key to understanding Daniel 1 rests in understanding *nephesh* as being something more than a word (*see* footnote 23). They did not want their *nephesh* to perish. What Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did in chapter one strengthened their faith in God and it provided the fortitude that they would need later in order to not deny God. For Daniel, that scenario occurred when he was cast into the lion's den (*see* Daniel 6). For Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, it occurred when they were cast into the fire (*see* Daniel 3). As Miller writes, "the principle theological focus of the book is the sovereignty of God. Every page reflects the author's conviction that his God was the Lord of individuals, nations, and all of history."⁴²

Fasting for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah was not a show, or a public community event. It was, for them, a private and urgent call to God to preserve their lives in what only appeared to be a benign situation. They could have taken the route many no doubt took and just given in to temptation, except they knew their souls would be separated from God forever if they simply gave in and followed the crowd. No one knew they were fasting except God, and God openly rewarded them for their faith and trust in God.

Concerning that faith, and determination, to not give in and do as others, Miller writes, "their new location may have tempted them to be unfaithful. Judah was nine hundred miles away; parents and friends would never know whether or not they kept God's laws. Yet Daniel and his friends were aware of a very important fact. Other people might not know their actions, but God would know, and someday all will give an account of themselves to him."⁴³ Indeed, this is an

⁴² Miller, *Daniel*, 50. *See also* Lucas, *Daniel*, 56-57, "Explanation" subhead for a similar view on the sovereignty God in Daniel. In addition, *see* Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Book of Daniel: Evidences Relating to Persons and Chronology," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 44-49; David Noel Freedman, "The Babylonian Chronicle," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 19, no. 3 (1956): 56-58; and, Sprinkle, *Daniel*, 36-37, for solutions concerning dating issues in Daniel.

⁴³ Miller, *Daniel*, 67.

important consideration for every Christian regarding every decision that they make.

The first chapter of Daniel also provides a lesson for people facing desperate and challenging times today. If we follow the example of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, we must *first purpose in our hearts to seek counsel from God*—whether that involves fasting or not. And, as a side note, remember that these were young boys filled with youthful strength, the unpolluted air that we breathe in today, no processed foods in their systems, or prescription drugs to fix the ailments caused by the processed foods and polluted air, and they had a reason for setting a 10-day limit for their fast that honored God and what God had done specifically for God’s chosen people at a specific time in history.

In addition to seeking God’s counsel, when we face desperate circumstances, we must be willing to listen to the reason for human opposition, join forces with other believers, make strategic and reasonable compromises when necessary, and expect God to move on our behalf. What Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did also brings to mind the words of Jesus in Matthew 6, especially vv. 16-18.

That is so because they certainly had to do everything in Matthew 6—especially not appearing to fast; recognize the sovereignty of God as being apart from, and over Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim alike; believe that the will of God would continue to operate in their lives even in Babylonia; believe that God would give them their daily, kosher, bread; forgive Ashpenaz, who was only doing his job, and owed them nothing (*see* footnote 8); and, believe that God had not lead them to a place of temptation where God could not keep them from that temptation, but instead would deliver them from the evil because God’s kingdom remained over all, with power and

glory—and, “in spite of present appearances, God is in control.”⁴⁴ For a visual of this, *see* “Exhibit: The Lord’s Prayer in Daniel 1” below.

As for my part, I, Diana K. Mitchell, melzar of YHWH (*see* 1 Pet 4:10), set out to prove *hazzêrô ‘îm* referred to seeds because I could see in the text that Daniel must have been trying to fast. I never thought that I would find The Lord’s Prayer in Daniel 1. But, then again, Jesus himself appears in Daniel 7:13-14 ... and in 7:27. May God bless all who call upon God in the name of Jesus to be as compassionate, empathic, and as wise as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah proved to be to the Chaldeans and the Hebrews.

Exhibit: The Lord’s Prayer in Daniel 1

The Lord’s Prayer in Daniel 1	
Matthew 6:9-13 KJV	Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah certainly had to do everything in Matthew 6—especially not appearing to fast;
Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name (6:9).	recognize the sovereignty of God as being apart from, and over Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim alike (<i>see</i> 1:1-2);
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (6:10).	believe that the will of God would continue to operate in their lives even in Babylonia (<i>see</i> 1:3-7);
Give us this day our daily bread (6:11).	believe that God would give them their daily, kosher, bread (<i>see</i> 1:8);
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (6:12).	forgive Ashpenaz, who was only doing his job, and owed them nothing (<i>see</i> 1:9-10, and footnote 8);
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (6:13).	and, believe that God had not lead them to a place of temptation where God could not keep them from that temptation, but instead would deliver them from the evil because God’s kingdom remained over all, with power and glory (<i>see</i> 1:11-20).
Diana K. Mitchell, from the paper: Pulse and Self-Preservation in Daniel 1:12 (academia.com)	

Other papers on academia.com by me: “The Urim and the Thummim as Instruments of God’s Complete Grace and Mercy in the Old Testament,” and “Observations of the Final Judgment in Revelation 20.”

⁴⁴ Longman III, Daniel, 42.

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