



**BETHEL**  
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## The Sovereignty of God's Blessing, Part 2

What do the following numeral sequences have in common?

- 1, 3, 9, 27
- 1, 2, 4, 7, 11
- 1, 4, 13, 40, 121

With each sequence, there is a hidden factor or key which when discovered brings order to the progression. For example, the first sequence is created by multiplying each number by three.

The second sequence is created by adding 1 to the first number, 2 to the second number, 3 to the third number, 4 to the fourth number, and so on and so forth. The third sequence is created by multiplying by 3 and then adding 1.

Some of us love these, don't we? We love finding the hidden key that unlocks a puzzle. And many of us find it fascinating to find the hidden key that unlocks a passage of Scripture. And last time we saw that Daniel 1 was a crucial chapter which serves as the foundation upon which the rest of this book rests! In this first book of the Bible whose history occurred in the exile, the Lord deigned to direct His people's focus — from one that would have been preoccupied with self (which tends to be the case in difficulty) to one that is in awe over the greatness of God as manifested in the Lord's Sovereign control over life! Truly, even in the bitterness of life, God is on the throne gloriously working His will for His glory and our good. Tremper Longman wrote this:

The effect of the theme of 'God's giving' throughout the chapter [which is referenced no less than three times, cf. 1:2, 9, 17] is to press home who is really in control of the events of Daniel's life. (Longman, 1999, p. 54)

Sinclair Ferguson added this:

All too frequently we take a different view of our trials and temptations. We tend to see them as isolated nightmares. God, however, sees them from a different perspective. They are important and connected punctuation marks in the biography of grace He is writing in our lives. (Ferguson, 1988, p. 38)

This is the glorious message of this first chapter of Daniel!

And yet behind Daniel and his friend's success, behind the working of God's providence in their lives, lies a key; what might be called "the secret" to their success. And it is our privilege to examine this "Key."

Recall that Judah has just suffered the first of three major defeats at the hands of Babylon in which both possessions and people were taken into exile. The first defeat occurred in 605 BC and involved the portable vessels of the house of God (Daniel 5:3) and the children of the noblemen and intelligentsia of Judah (Daniel 1:3). As such, it was a relatively small deportation of people, but an important one! Daniel and his friends were the trail blazers of their nations' exile. Through them, God would proclaim important messages of encouragement and comfort to the hundreds of thousands that would follow. God considered them to be sacrificial offerings they were "youths in whom was no defect" (v. 4) and this is the language of worship! They were children of men and women who clearly were impacted by Josiah's reform of 622 BC. As such, they bore significant names:

- Daniel: "God is my Judge"
- Mishael: "Who is like the Lord?"

- Hananiah: “The Lord is Gracious”
- Azariah: “The Lord is my Helper”

Yet they immediately were subject to brainwashing which included, a change of identity:

- Daniel became Belteshazzar- “Bel [a Babylonian deity] Protect the King.”
- Hananiah became Shadrach- “Servant of Aku” (another Babylonian god).
- Mishael became Meshach- “Who is like Aku?”
- Azariah became Abednego- “Servant of Nego” (the god of vegetation).

They also were isolated into a small cell and given a supervisor who lived with them, ate with them, and essentially monitored everything they did and discussed.

Next came temptation as they were given a lifestyle of opulence which no one in Israel and few in Babylon could have imagined. They literally could live as a king eating from his table, dwelling in his courts!

Finally, they were indoctrinated as they began a rigorous study of Babylonian literature, politics, history, and religion. The question that is raised through it all is this: Would these young, impressionable, children (basically) endure as servants of God? Or would they be absorbed into the Babylonian system and culture?

Romans 14:4b: “...and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand!”

This is a huge theme of the exile! The trials and difficulties of diaspora-living (to use a concept from 1 Peter 1:1) could NOT thwart the purpose and will of the Lord as it relates to His people! “Nothing can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

The sufferings of this life are insignificant “in light of the eternal weight of glory” that is ours in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)! Truly, their presence in the valley of the shadow of death was, to use the words of Peter describing our exile as Christians on this earth:

1 Peter 1:2, “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...”

As such, “we are more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37) NOT because in our weakness we strap bombs to our chest and blow up people (in the attempt to please God), BUT because of the grace and mercy of Christ! In fact, Daniel 1 gives us an important example of the sovereignty of God’s blessing as we behold the preserving grace of God at the outset.

Daniel 1:8a, “But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank...”

We do not know what it was that would have defiled Daniel and his friends at this point; it is not important! What is important is that in spite of their young age, these four boys were driven NOT by fear, sorrow, peer pressure, or the desire to manipulate. RATHER, they were driven by the person and program of Christ! That is huge! So BEFORE they entered the valley, clearly they purposed NOT to compromise their fidelity to Christ in any way! And God honored that passion; He always does! This understandably led to the conflict.

Daniel 1:8b, 10, "...so [Daniel] sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself... and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.'"

This was a serious conflict! On the one hand, a compromised conscience doesn't make for a good student. On the other hand, Daniel is rejecting the food given to him by Nebuchadnezzar which would have been viewed as an act of treason (carrying the death penalty)! Not surprisingly the Babylonian official, charged with overseeing most likely all the cells, turned a deaf ear to Daniel's plea; he wasn't about to pin his life on the scruples of a child! This led to the secret contest.

Daniel 1:11-14, "But Daniel said to the overseer [what I've referenced as the "den mother"- though he was a male] whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be observed in your presence, and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see.' So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days."

The request essentially was the trading of their meal with that of this live-in overseer. So for ten days Daniel and his friends would eat his meal (the meal of a minor official in Babylon) and this minor official would eat theirs! If after ten days Daniel and his friends were NOT healthy and spry, they'd accept the king's food. What happened? We now see the consequence.

Daniel 1:15-16, "And at the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables."

This is rather incredible! Again were Daniel and his friends eating a superior diet? By all accounts, "No!" But that is not the point! The point is that God deigned to bless the conviction of Daniel and his friends. Truly, they could have been eating candy for every meal and it wouldn't have mattered. What mattered was the Sovereign will of God to bless His people in the crucible! This raises an important question, on what basis did God bless His people? On

what basis does He bless us as we walk through the valleys in which His providence directs us?  
That brings us to the keys.

### The First Key: Covenant Loyalty

Daniel 1:9, "Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials"

This is an interesting statement which is sort of just thrown out there in the middle of The Conflict (vv. 8, 10) which Daniel had with the Babylonians! Verse 8 and 10 flow naturally together. Verse 9 however sits there awkwardly, but it clearly is on purpose! In the middle of Daniel's conflict over honoring God and honoring the demands of the Babylonians, we read, "Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials."

The implication is that the reason that God granted Daniel "favor and compassion" is because Daniel "purposed in his heart to honor God" - a passion his nation had lost a long time before! In fact, you must see that this is a KEY element to a covenant relationship with God. Don't miss it! In Scripture, covenant fidelity will mean blessing; infidelity will be accompanied by covenant cursing/leanness of soul.

This is David's death-bed charge to Solomon:

1 Kings 2:3-4, "...keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, so that the Lord may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"

This passage is packed with information. First notice, David clearly understood that the charge which rested on his life was consistent with the charge/covenant God established with Moses! Secondly and accordingly, Solomon must be careful to uphold God's word. If he didn't, there would be consequences for himself and the nation! Truly, only as David's sons walked faithfully before the Lord would they enjoy the blessings of God's covenant word (cf. also 2 Samuel 7:28; 1 Kings 8:15, 20, 56; 9:4-5; 2 Kings 17:15-16, 18; etc.). We see this in God's exhortation to Eli:

1 Samuel 2:30, "Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever' [but there was an implied conditionality to it]; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me- for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.'"

I hope you see this: covenant fidelity will result in blessing; covenant rebellion will result in difficulty! If we honor God- as did Daniel- God will honor us! Thus when the nation Israel turned their back on God in the wilderness we read this:

Psalms 106:15, “[The Lord] gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

We see this principle interwoven throughout the New Testament.

Ephesians 6:2-3, “Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”

Truly, if we “honor” those who hold divine authority over us, it will go well with us! Paul speaking to Timothy regarding the wealthy Christians at Ephesus wrote:

1 Timothy 6:17a, 19b, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world... so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”

Family of God, we live in a cause effect world! If we prove faithful to the covenant, we are granted, NOT by merit BUT by consequence, blessing. Truly in this regard we must see that covenant fidelity is its own reward in that it places us in a blessed life!

Think of two mountain paths. One is relatively flat with few cumbrances and so provides for an excellent walking path for any and all who want to get or stay in shape. Yet it is lined with poison ivy and saturated with ticks. The other is a treacherous rout with sharp boulders and sheer cliffs. It doesn't make for the easiest outing, but the views are breathtaking. If one were to choose either trail, they would encounter difficulty NOT as a penalty for choosing the path, BUT as a result. It is in this way the covenant fidelity is the path of blessing in God's kingdom; blessing accompanies covenant loyalty! We see it in Paul's exhortation not to the unbeliever, but to the believer:

1 Timothy 5:6, “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

If you choose the path of wanton pleasure as a Christian, God is NOT going to get you while you sleep. BUT you must know that Covenant blessing will not be found there, just “leanness of soul”! That is a key principle in God's Kingdom. And as such, it was a Key principle to Daniel's success in captivity. He honored God and as a result, God honored him!

What an important message for the hundreds of thousands who would follow this young man into exile! If they would honor the Lord in captivity, God would honor them! If they chose the path of least resistance, they'd be absorbed into the Babylonian life and culture, which any with the eye of faith could see was cursed! So, what were the people of God to do in captivity? What were they to think? Was God still on the throne? Not only was God still on the throne, but great and eternal blessings still could be found if only they would be moved by God's glory!

Truly, covenant loyalty is an important key to blessing in this life! Yet it is NOT the ultimate key. Notice the second key, the pleasure of God.

## The Pleasure of God

Recall Nebuchadnezzar charged Ashpenaz thus take:

Daniel 1:4, “Youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of* wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge...”

One of the things that marked out Daniel and his friends is that they did NOT acquire, BUT were given from the start “intelligence, good looks, and a heart of wisdom and discretion.” As many translations put it, “They were endowed...” with these things! We must ask, “Why them? Why were they chosen? Why did they have a heart for the Lord? Why did they choose the path of blessing?” The answer here is one and the same as in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 9:11, “...I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability...”

Then to what do we ascribe these things? The movement of the book points us to God (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)! It is according to the honor, glory, and pleasure of God! Paul put it this way when speaking of Jacob and Esau:

Romans 9:11-12, “Though *the twins* were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to *His* choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’”

This is so important! Covenant loyalty is key to blessing in this life. Yet God’s good pleasure trumps even this! If God has deigned to bless a person in Christ, then they will be blessed! We see it in Jeremiah’s life:

Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Ultimately it wasn’t up to Jeremiah! His person and calling were according to the predetermined plan of God! And so it is with all God’s people.<sup>1</sup>

John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain...”

This is a major key when it came to Daniel and his life of fidelity and service to the Lord. He honored God NOT because he was morally superior; BUT because God deigned it so to be! It was God who:

Daniel 1:2, “Gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar!”

Daniel 1:9, “Granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials!”

Daniel 1:17, “God gave [Daniel and his friends] knowledge and intelligence in every *branch* of literature and wisdom!”

And so it will be in our lives as well! This ought NOT to make us lackadaisical in our walks- “*what Alla wills!*” Rather, it is given that we might be encouraged! Do you understand? Not even your sin can thwart God’s will and purpose for you! He who began a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6)!

So truly: Daniel was blessed greatly because of his covenant devotion and service in Christ. BUT ultimately, any and all blessing he encountered was rooted and grounded in the sovereign will of God to bless! What an incredibly important truth for God’s people to understand as they were taken into captivity! THE KEY to their survival in exile was housed firstly in their covenant fidelity to the Lord, but then in God’s good pleasure and purpose.

With this we are left to live in our exile in light of the glorious tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility! Because God is sovereign, we do not despair when we see our weaknesses and failings. For ultimately, it is NOT what we do, BUT what God deigns to do through us in Christ! Because we are responsible (God uses the secondary means of our will and choice to bring about our maturation) we ought not to slumber or be indifferent! Covenant fidelity places the child of God on a path that is most blessed!

With this, notice how the chapter ends: it gives a description of how God deigned to bless Daniel because of Daniel’s devotion and yet ultimately God’s sovereign will.

The result in Daniel’s life was fourfold, first with ability.

Daniel 1:17, “And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every *branch* of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all *kinds* of visions and dreams.”

To these four young men who honored God, the Lord blessed with “knowledge and intelligence.” See it truly is the case that “The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom...” (Psalms 111:10)! Because these four men revered God, they excelled in “knowledge and intelligence”- that is learning/content (מַדְדָּה [madda ]) and understanding/application (שִׂכְלָה [sākal]).

Now in preparation for Daniel 2, we are informed here also that to Daniel alone God gave a special gift to “understand all kinds of visions and dreams,” a gift that would save not only he and his friends, but an entire nation of “wise men.”

Daniel was also given worldly favor.



Daniel 1:18-19, "Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service."

It isn't always the case that God's people find worldly favor. Oft-times our commitment to Christ brings about conflict with the world such that the world hates us (Matthew 10:22). Yet for Daniel and his friends, God caused them to find favor in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar such that they were commissioned to serve the king directly!

Once again, pause and wonder! Without the use of sword or chariot, God took Nebuchadnezzar's court captive by placing four Jewish men in the position of chief advisor!

Oh Christian, I hope you see. God doesn't need our labors, stratagem, or endeavors to mold and shape a nation! He uses whom He chooses and places them in positions of service and authority to do His will. Our hope therefore is NOT in the election of Christian senators or a president, BUT our Sovereign Lord who deigns to bless. That doesn't mean that we don't labor to engage the culture in which we live. Rather, it means that success must be measured not by results, but our faithfulness!

Daniel's obedience also resulted in fruit.

Daniel 1:20, "And as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* conjurers who *were* in all his realm."

There is an element of hyperbole in the statement that they were found to be "ten times better."<sup>2</sup> The idea is that they excelled way beyond any of the wise men and conjurers in Babylon.

In what way did they excel? Was it that these boys had more knowledge than the rest of the wise men of Babylon? Hardly! Was it that the profundity of their statements was deeper than that of the conjurers of Babylon? No again! Well then, in what way did they excel? The Bible makes it clear that the superiority of Daniel's wisdom was not a matter of degree, but of kind. Babylonian wise men were not incompetent; they simply were false! They claimed to receive their wisdom from gods which either did not exist or were demons! Accordingly, Daniel's wisdom and that of his friends truly would have been "ten times better" for it was couched in reality!

And God blessed Daniel with longevity.

Daniel 1:21, "And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king."

With this we think of Paul's words:

Ephesians 6:2-3: “Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.”

The fifth commandment ultimately is the call to honor the Lord as He exercises authority through lawful leaders. Because Daniel honored the Lord in this way, his life truly was long on the earth. He lived into the reign of Cyrus which began in 539 BC. In fact, it is clear from Daniel 10:1 that Daniel was serving in Babylon as late as 536 BC (which would have put him well into his 80s)!

It is important to keep in mind that these were the particular blessings which accompanied the path which Daniel trod. Truly, this isn't how God deigns to bless all His children. Think of it, God blessed Daniel with long life. Another way God deigns to bless His people- specifically afflicted ones- is through their ultimate graduation, death.

Psalms 149:4, “For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation.”

From this I want you to see that the particular expression of God's blessing really is not important. What is important is recognizing that, as Christians, Covenant Blessing- goodness and mercy- shall follow us all the days of our lives such that we have at all times the glorious anticipation that we shall forever dwell in the house of the Lord!

Such is the nature of the sovereignty of God's blessing!

## Bibliography

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Longman, T. (1999). *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also Gal. 1:15; John 15:16.

<sup>2</sup> “Ten times” is a common idiom in scripture (Gen. 31:41; Num. 14:22; Neh. 4:12; and cf. ‘seven times’, Daniel 3:19).