

Daniel 1:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Analysis

The phrase "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom" reveals the source of the young men's excellence. The Hebrew natan (נָתָן, "gave") emphasizes divine gifting rather than mere natural talent. While they applied themselves diligently to their studies, God sovereignly blessed their efforts with supernatural insight. This demonstrates that true wisdom begins with fearing the Lord (Proverbs 1:7) and that believers can excel in secular fields while maintaining spiritual integrity.

The distinction that "Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams" marks him as uniquely gifted for prophetic ministry. This ability would prove crucial throughout the book as Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and receives apocalyptic visions. God equips His servants according to their specific callings, distributing gifts as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). Daniel's interpretive gift points forward to Christ, who perfectly reveals the Father and makes known all mysteries (John 1:18, Colossians 2:2-3).

This verse teaches that believers need not choose between academic excellence and spiritual faithfulness. God can grant wisdom in secular disciplines when pursued for His glory. Daniel and his friends mastered Babylonian literature and language not to assimilate but to serve God more effectively in exile. Their example encourages Christians in academia, business, and government to pursue excellence while maintaining distinct spiritual identity.

Historical Context

After three years of intensive training in Babylonian language, literature, and wisdom (604-602 BC), Daniel and his companions completed their preparation for royal service. The curriculum likely included cuneiform writing, Akkadian language, Babylonian astronomy/astrology, mathematics, religious texts, and legal traditions. Nebuchadnezzar's empire required multilingual, culturally sophisticated administrators to govern diverse territories.

Ancient Mesopotamian education was highly advanced, particularly in mathematics, astronomy, and literature. The famous Epic of Gilgamesh, Enuma Elish creation myths, and extensive legal codes exemplify Babylonian intellectual achievement. Daniel mastered these subjects while rejecting their pagan worldview, demonstrating the possibility of engaging culture critically from a biblical perspective. His education equipped him for decades of influential service under multiple empires.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How can you pursue excellence in your field while maintaining biblical convictions that may conflict with prevailing assumptions?
2. What does Daniel's example teach about engaging cultural knowledge critically rather than accepting or rejecting it wholesale?

Interlinear Text

בְּאָלָה יְמִין לְקָרְבָּן נָתָן | אֶרְבָּעָת מִן בָּא לְהָיָה וּבְיַלְדֵי מִן

children

H428

As for these four

H702

gave

H0

God

H3206

H5414

H430

וְדָנִיָּאָל וְחִכְמָתָה וְמַדְעָה מִן בְּכָל וּבְשִׁכְפָּה לְמִדְעָה

them knowledge

H4093

and skill

H7919

H3605

in all learning

H5612

and wisdom

H2451

and Daniel

H1840

בְּבָבִין בְּכָל וּבְזִרְעָנִים וּבְלִלְמֹות:

had understanding

H995

H3605

in all visions

H2377

and dreams

H2472

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 3:12 (Parallel theme): Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

James 1:5 (References God): If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

Job 32:8 (Parallel theme): But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

Daniel 2:21 (Parallel theme): And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

Daniel 2:23 (References God): I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

Colossians 1:9 (Parallel theme): For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Proverbs 2:6 (Parallel theme): For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.

Acts 6:10 (Parallel theme): And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Acts 7:22 (Parallel theme): And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

James 1:17 (Parallel theme): Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

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