

# Daniel 1:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

## Analysis

**And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm**—The phrase "ten times better" (eser yadot, עשר ידיות) literally means "ten hands," an idiom for exceptional superiority. The word "wisdom" (chokmah, חוכמה) refers to practical skill and discernment, while "understanding" (binah, בינה) denotes insight and ability to distinguish between options. Nebuchadnezzar subjected Daniel and his friends to rigorous examination (sha'al, שאל, "enquired/questioned") and discovered their comprehensive excellence.

The comparison with "magicians" (chartummim, חרטומים)—the same term used for Pharaoh's sorcerers in Exodus—and "astrologers" (ashshaphim, אֲשָׁפִים, literally "enchanters" or "conjurers") is striking. These practitioners represented Babylon's accumulated wisdom tradition, yet the Hebrew youths who refused defilement far surpassed them. This demonstrates that fearing Yahweh provides true wisdom (Proverbs 9:10), while pagan learning divorced from divine revelation produces inferior understanding.

The tenfold superiority wasn't merely intellectual but moral and spiritual. Their diet of vegetables and water (1:12-16) shouldn't naturally produce such results—this is divine blessing on faithfulness. God honored their refusal to compromise by granting them extraordinary ability. This pattern recurs throughout Scripture:

Joseph's wisdom exceeded Egyptian sorcerers (Genesis 41:8, 38-39), Moses was educated in Egyptian wisdom yet faithful to Yahweh (Acts 7:22), and Solomon's God-given wisdom surpassed all eastern wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-31). True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

## Historical Context

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This examination occurred around 602 BC after three years of intensive Babylonian education (605-602 BC). Nebuchadnezzar's court magicians represented centuries of Mesopotamian learning—astronomy, mathematics, divination, and dream interpretation. The king's testing wasn't casual but rigorous evaluation to determine fitness for royal service. Ancient Near Eastern courts valued wisdom highly; competent advisors could significantly influence policy and national welfare. Daniel's superior performance gave him access to power centers where he served faithfully for seven decades under multiple empires.

## Related Passages

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**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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1. How does Daniel's tenfold superiority over pagan wisdom challenge modern assumptions that secular education surpasses biblically-grounded learning?
2. In what ways does compromise in 'small' matters of obedience actually diminish rather than enhance our effectiveness in the world?

## Interlinear Text

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|                        |                    |             |         |                |                            |          |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------|---------|----------------|----------------------------|----------|
| וְכֹל                  | לִכְמָד            | בְּנֵי      | בֵּין   | בֵּין          | אֲשֶׁר                     | בְּקַשׁ  |
| H3605                  | And in all matters | H1697       | H2451   | H998           | H834                       | enquired |
| מֶלֶךְ                 | לְרֹא              | מִתְחִזְקָה | שְׁרֵךְ | עַד            | לִזְהָר                    | כָּל     |
| H1992                  | that the king      | H4428       | H4672   | H6235          | H3027                      | H3605    |
| מִכְרְתָּמִים          | בְּכָל             | רָאשָׁפָים  | בְּכָל  | מִלְכּוֹתָהוּ: |                            |          |
| than all the magicians | H2748              | H825        | H834    | H3605          | that were in all his realm | H4438    |

## Additional Cross-References

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**Exodus 8:19** (Parallel theme): Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said.

**Isaiah 19:3** (Parallel theme): And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.

**Job 19:3** (Parallel theme): These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me.

**Nehemiah 4:12** (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.

**Exodus 8:7** (Parallel theme): And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

**Exodus 7:22** (Parallel theme): And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.

**Genesis 41:8** (Parallel theme): And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

**Genesis 31:7** (Parallel theme): And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me.

**Numbers 14:22** (Parallel theme): Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

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