

Speak up and get on

Ashpenaz: Show in the Israelites.

Servant brings in Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Ashpenaz: Come this way. Let's have a look at you. (Surveys them) Yes, you'll do. Very fine. Very fine indeed. As you may or may not know, my name is Ashpenaz and I am the chief of the court officials here in Babylon.

Daniel: We are honoured to meet you.

Ashpenaz: Yes, well (somewhat abashed) ...it falls to me to tell you that you have been selected from the Israelites who have been brought into exile here to perform a very special job.

Mishael: We feel very honoured, sir.

Ashpenaz: Yes, the King of all Babylonia, Nebuchadnezzar, has instructed me to select a number of young men to be in service to him. I have spent some time watching you all and I am pleased to say you have been accorded the great honour of being chosen to be trained for service to the great King.

Mishael: We already are in service to a great King.

Azariah: A King above all Kings

Ashpenaz: I presume you are referring to your so-called god. I have to remind you that you are no longer in Jerusalem and your sole allegiance now must be to the great Nebuchadnezzar. Anyway, back to the matter in hand. As I said, you have been selected for this great honour.

Hananiah: May I ask what the selection criteria were?

Ashpenaz: Yes, by all means. I was to select young men without

physical defect, handsome and those who show aptitude for learning. We need quick-witted, intelligent men, fit for the king's service.

Daniel: I speak for all of us when I say how honoured we feel.

Ashpenaz: Quite so, quite so. Well we must get on with matters. First of all your names.

Daniel: I am Daniel and these are Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah

Ashpenaz: We shall have to do something about that right away. We can't have clumsy difficult to pronounce Hebrew names in the court. Let's see... (to Daniel) you can be Belteshazzar...

Daniel: (Cagily) Yes, that will be simpler

Ashpenaz: (to Hananiah) You'll be Shadrach...(to Mishael) you can be Meshach and Azariah you'll be Abednego

Azariah: (to Mishael) At least we won't have to change our initials.

Ashpenaz: It falls to me to teach you Babylonian language and literature and to give you an intensive 3 year training course for the king's service. In return you will have a daily amount of food from the king's own table. A great honour.

Daniel: Again we feel honoured ... but there is a slight problem, if you don't mind me mentioning it.

Ashpenaz: What could it possibly be. Of all your companions you have been selected to lead a very privileged lifestyle.

Daniel: It is the matter of the food. This food would be food that had been dedicated to your gods?

Ashpenaz: In some cases quite possibly.

Daniel: And might it also be food which we as Jews have expressly been forbidden to eat by God?

Ashpenaz: Again that is, I suppose quite possible. But think of what you have in the life of the court. Surely worth swallowing a few principles for.

Azariah: We'd rather keep the principles and not swallow the food.

Daniel: We don't want to defile ourselves in this way. I'm quite adamant on that point.

Ashpenaz: But...but...please see it from my point of view. It's not just my job at stake, it could very well be my life. The King will see you every day and can make comparisons with others around him. He'll see you're failing to thrive and pretty soon he'll know you're not eating his food he's assigned to you...and that's me for the chop.

Mishael: Better you should have the chop. That's something we're definitely not allowed.

Ashpenaz: No, I mean my head will be chopped off.

Mishael: Oh, sorry.

Daniel: I think I see a way ahead. Give us a test, a trial period of say 10 days

Ashpenaz: What do you mean?

Daniel: Well for the next 10 days we'll eat just vegetables and drink only water. See if you notice any difference between us and other young men.

Ashpenaz: Well... well...you seem to be confident...and...well, why not. Let's give it a try.

Narrator: At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.

The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel,

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.

In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.