

## DANIEL, - A LESSON IN OBEDIENCE

Dan. 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel was a man greatly used of God in a foreign land and among a people who were not his own. He had been taken from his homeland of Israel in 605 BC (i.e. exile of the 'intelligenzia'; 597 BC, the craftsmen; 586BC, the remainder), and from the city of Jerusalem where he lived in a privileged environment. He was highly educated and was also a faithful servant of Israel's God, Jehovah.

Prior to being carried off into exile he had often visited the glorious temple built during the reign of King Solomon ... the house of God which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had ransacked and also carried away, - *stolen*, - the vessels and artefacts that had been used in Israel's solemn worship of Jehovah. By the way, that was Nebuchadnezzar's way of saying, My gods are better than yours for if your God was any good He would have stopped me!

Nebuchadnezzar came from the land of Shinar, and that is the God-denying region mentioned in Gen. 11. It was where the enemies of God had established their kingdom and set about building the infamous Tower of Babel. The Lord, of course, frustrated their plans and the tower was not built. Nonetheless, they remained there and built a magnificent city that would become the centre of opposition to God, - they called it Babel, meaning 'Confusion'. It later came to be known as *Babylon* ... and that is where King Nebuchadnezzar ruled from. He was the King of a city whose foundations were built in opposition to God.

So that is where Daniel is in chapter one. He did not choose to be there. Instead, he was brought there as a prisoner, and as a captive.

However, the Lord always works everything out in accordance with His own will and purposes ... and the reason He hadn't stopped Nebuchadnezzar was because, - as we are told in the first chapter of Habakkuk's prophecy, - God's defence of Judah was over, at least for a while. His temple could be robbed and He wouldn't put up any obstruction or obstacle.

Daniel was also in Babylon because that is the place where God intended to use Him. He put an idea into the king's head to employ young men like Daniel. From King Nebuchadnezzar's perspective, his intentions were ominous for he was planning to 'de-Judaize' the Jews, especially the young men, <sup>3</sup> And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring *certain* of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes.

To some, it might have seemed a very generous contribution to invite the young of a foreign nation to be brought up along with the cream of Babylon. Indeed, nothing less than the top ‘pedigree’ would be sought, **4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace ...** This was the category into which Daniel fitted. He was intellectually bright. He was a brilliant young man. He had no physical defects or flaws. He was popular and well-liked. ... He was the type of young man, - the king hoped, - that could be diverted away from his roots and made into a promising son of Babylon ... and that was how Nebuchadnezzar saw it, **4 whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.** ... Daniel would become absorbed in Babylonian society, he would marry a beautiful young girl from Babylon, they would have children, and they would be brought up as Babylonians ... That was the plan, anyway!

So, it wasn’t as generous and as beneficial a contribution as it seemed. Instead, it was a subtle way of influencing these young men away from the faith of their fathers. Whereas, in Egypt Pharaoh commanded the midwives, **Ex. 1:16 When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women ... if it be a son, then ye shall kill him.** ... This was more subtle in Babylon ... Satan had learned from his previous impatience. In Babylon he was trying a different tactic ... softly, softly! ... Steal these youngsters away from what their parents teach them, and *has* been teaching them throughout the centuries.

... Invite them in among us. Let them sit at our table and eat of our food. Let them hear how we speak and let them learn from our knowledge. Give them privilege ... make them as one of us, but equally be sure none of ours become as them. That was the king’s plan! He was setting out to indoctrinate and inseminate the minds and characters of these Jewish young men by instilling within them the ways of godless Babylon. He wanted them to forget God, and forget the truth of God with which they had been brought up. He wanted it wiped completely out of their minds! ... That was the plot! ... That was the same plot the serpent introduced in the Garden of Eden, - push God to the one side ... and then get rid of Him completely for you don’t need Him!

Has the plot changed any? Of course, it hasn’t. Satan continues to try and infiltrate the minds of our children and young people using the same old means he used in Daniel’s day.

Oh yes, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were no ordinary young Jewish men, of course. They were the ‘cream’ ... but having said that, the ordinary young Jewish men would have looked up to them. The young Jewish men who Nebuchadnezzar would bring into his court would influence those ‘out there’ in the ordinary Jewish society. This would have an encapsulating effect because the Jewish young men ‘at the top’ would ‘draw in’ the rest. ... This was very subtle! Nebuchadnezzar knew what he was doing! And the ‘prize’ at the end of their three-year probation period was that [they might stand before the king \(v.5\)](#) ... that is another way of saying, [they might serve the king.](#)

They would *graduate*! The king had invested in them three years of daily provisions of food and wine from the royal kitchen. He didn’t do that for nothing for he was *determined* to take them away from their Hebrew and Jewish ways and make them into Babylonians! He was making them feel obligated because of the ‘best of Babylon’ he was giving to them. They will never return to eating Hebrew food after they have eaten from my bountiful table! ... It was all part of how he was trying to brainwash them. He reckoned that after three years of the high-living, they would be completely ‘won over’! They would be Hebrews no longer!

He even went so far as to take from them their Hebrew names. That is another process of brainwashing ... Change their names so they will forget their roots. They will forget their heritage, they will forget their family, they will forget how they were brought up, and you will gradually strip them of their identity. ... Notice back in verse three, [And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring \*certain\* of the children of Israel](#) ... and then verse six tells us, [Now among these](#) ... That means there were more than just four Hebrew children on this special programme of Nebuchadnezzar’s, but it seems as if all the others did not make the same impression as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were the four that would not succumb to the king’s demands

No, their new Babylonian names ... Daniel is a Hebrew name he was given at birth which means “God is my Judge”, and he was given the kingly Babylonian name of Belteshazzar, meaning “prince/protector of the king”, and it related to the pagan Baal. Daniel’s three friends, - Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, - were similarly given Babylonian names. Hananiah (“God has favoured”) was given the name Shadrach, which was associated with the Babylonian moon god, Shudur Aku (Marduk). Mishael (“Who is like God?”) became known as Meshach (“guest of a king”). ...

Azariah (Jehovah has helped”) became Abednego (“servant of the Nebo”, Nebo was the son of Baal). ... And that was another ploy whereby Nebuchadnezzar planned on wiping out the Hebrew-Jewish children ... by removing any connection with their previous identity.

What must it have been like for them?! Every time they were called, they were addressed by a foreign name that related to a pagan idol. ... Imagine, every time Daniel was summoned, he had *Baal* in his name! ... Yes, their language of Hebrew had been replaced by the Chaldean. Their clothes were the garments of an idolatrous nation. Every day they spent in the company of the goddess ... they were taught by idolaters instead of being taught in the ways of their fathers who since the days of Moses had declared, **Dt. 6:4** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: **5** And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. **6** And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: **7** And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And do you notice something else? Whereas, - in almost similar situations, - Moses had his mother looking after him in the Pharaoh’s palace, and Esther had Mordecai looking after her, - ... but there is no mention of the families of either Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, or Azariah. These were goddess times, in a goddess nation, with goddess rules and laws ... and yet God had kept four young faithful servants. Once again, He cannot be over-ruled!

From the outset these four young men had determined to remain obedient to their God ... and not to compromise *for God does not compromise*. The idolaters had changed their names and their clothes ... but Nebuchadnezzar could not change their hearts! His laws would condemn them to the fiery furnace, but they continued to belong to the Lord of Heaven Who kept them. And that is how we read about Daniel also, **8** But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Daniel and his three friends stood apart as God’s separated people ... It was going to cost them, but they had to do it. They did not belong to those who imagined they could barter God’s truth in order to comply and conform to a comfortable lifestyle ... God won’t mind, He will understand. No, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.

Imagine if Daniel had *not* decided on this course of action ... Imagine if he had gone along with what the king was expecting of him ... He would have ended up no different to the godless Babylonians ... and he would have lost his standing with God. His witness would have crumbled. The other young men of Babylon would never have been prepared to change to Daniel's values and principles, but he was expected to adopt theirs ... They were trying to make Chaldeans out of these Jewish boys!

Pray especially for our young people today because that is what is expected of them. These are dangerous times. We often 'give off' about what is happening under the name of Christianity amongst the young people, but do we pray for them? It is harder for them today as it was for us because in our day the lines between right and wrong were far clearer ... Today they are so blurred. And even on the Church scene, the waters have been muddied by compromise and confusion. ... I'll never forget what the elderly woman said to me when the young people from another church were up dancing and drinking, - as they would do in any club in the town, - she said words to this effect, "You daren't say anything in case you drive them away". ... That is how we are suffering ... because instilled within their hearts is not the same knowledge of the God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Such pressure to conform ... in their relationships, in their principles, and in their behaviour! ... And we can so easily extend it to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ of all age-groups because around us we see many who would not be as Daniel's heart was.

Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself ... He was not going to be caught up with anything that would dishonour his testimony before his fellow-Jewish young people, and neither was he going to defile his testimony before God. It wasn't going to be easy, but that is what he decided. Even though a pagan name had been attached to him, and even though pagan wisdom had been taught to him, and pagan food was fed to him ... he was not going to be defiled or polluted.

It is not that all their teaching would have been wrong ... We mustn't 'throw the baby out with the bath water' because being *skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science (v.4)* would have been a good foundation for life. Of course, as nowadays, you would have to 'pick your way through some of it' ... but basically, they would have been privileged to have been given this education.

Even being called by Babylonian names ... I'm sure when they were 'on their own', they reverted to calling each other by their Hebrew names. Yes, some of these things you can put up with ... But Daniel and his friends were not prepared to put up with defiling and polluting their bodies.

It is worth pointing out that there was no specific law or commandment in Judaism that prohibited the taking of a Babylonian name, - for example, Hadassah's name changed to become Esther (Esther 2:7) ... and in Egypt the Pharaoh gave Joseph the name *Zaphnathpaaneah* (Gen. 41:45). Neither was there any Hebrew law against receiving a good education ... But there *was*, however, a very strict prohibition upon what a Jew could or could not eat ... and that is where Daniel 'drew the line'! The Word of God commanded clearly ... and Daniel was committed to keep that Word! ... That is what a true believer does. A true believer will not want to break God's Word. He will want to be obedient to it, even if, - like Daniel and his friends, - he is the only one in the crowd! That is *commitment*! ... And it is not simply commitment to words in a Book ... it is a commitment to God Who is the Author of the Book!

Why could he not eat the king's food? He could not eat it for two main reasons. Firstly, the Law of Moses set out that there were some foods not to be eaten, - some animals were 'clean' while others were 'unclean', - and of the foods that were to be eaten, they had to be prepared in a particular way (kosher). One of the gastronomic delights of the Babylonians, however, was pig, and of course eating from a pig was out of bounds to Jews. The second main reason they could not eat *the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank* was because it had been first offered to the idols. Symbolically, the king's feasts glorified the gods of Babylon ... so Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah could not eat it! ... Ah, but go on, you needn't pay any attention to that ... Do you think not?! If the Word of God says you shouldn't do it, then you shouldn't do it! ... If Daniel and his friends had participated in a pagan feast, they would have been 'walking all over' what God had commanded in His Word!

They could not do it, and they did not do it for they took their stand on the Scripture. God's Word was clear ... and they obeyed it. Why did they obey it? ... There is no mention of their parents being around to check them. They were away from home, with nobody watching over them. Besides, if you want to 'climb up the ladder' in Babylon you would be as well keeping in with the king and doing what he bids you.

... All kinds of thoughts could have gone through Daniel's mind ... It's only food, and anyway, I wouldn't be here if God had looked after us and kept us in Jerusalem. Or, God has placed me here so, therefore, He would allow me to 'bend the rules' a little ... It would have been so easy to compromise, but he didn't! ... He would not accept the lifestyle of the godless.

He didn't become 'crooked', or nasty, or bitter, or callous. He didn't end up turning everyone against him (... and remember this is just a young boy). He didn't cause a row, instead here is how it is recorded, [therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself](#). And the Lord was working ... even in the heart of the Babylonian Ashpenaz (v.3), for we read in God's plan and purpose, [9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs](#). ... The Lord had it already worked out!

Incidentally, Ashpenaz is the Chaldean name meaning "I will make prominent the sprinkled" ... and that is what he was hoping to do, - that was the job the king had given him, - but he wasn't going to get doing it with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah for the Lord would not allow it!

When you take your stand for the Lord, He will support you. He will have the ground prepared for you to walk on when you trust Him. Frank Sinatra used to sing, "I'll do it my way", but Daniel was brave enough to say, "Lord, I'll do it *Thy* way!"

There are some things the Bible does not make altogether clear for us, - whether you should wear black shoes going to church instead of brown shoes, - but equally there are many things it *does* make clear ... and in those things which it does make clear we must not compromise or disobey.

If you want to be of any use to God, - and after all, that is why He saved you, - ... then you need to serve Him the way He requires. Not my will, but Thine be done is what Jesus said, and He is our example.

Do you know why God used Daniel? God used him because he was faithful and lived an uncompromising life. Later on, when the king made a law that everyone had to bow down to the image he had made, Daniel and his three friends wouldn't do it ... and his three friends were thrown into the flames. But even there, they had the presence of God to keep them. On another occasion, all the rest of the rulers teamed up against Daniel and he was sent into the lion's den ... The Lord kept him there too.

Only faithful servants serve faithfully, and only faithful servants keep on in the Master's service until He calls them home. ... "O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end; Be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend" ... "A charge to keep I have, A God to glorify ... O may it all my powers engage To do my Master's will" ... "Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord, By the power of grace divine; Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope, And my will be lost in Thine." ... The standard of the Lord is the benchmark He requires of His people, and when you put your hand to the plough He is not prepared to see you looking back.

That is the kind of young man Daniel was, and he kept company with similar young men. They encouraged each other in the Lord, and here is the testimony they were blessed with, <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. <sup>20</sup> 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.

May God work amongst us in these days of compromise! May we keep faithful to His Word, and His people in that we would not defile ourselves with anything which would bring Him shame! Amen.