

Daniel 1 – Providence and Four Men of Substance

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: In the middle of the muddle 困惑 of the Jews in Babylonian captivity were men of substance who had not bowed the knee to commercialism, who cared for the weak, and who understood and appreciated the need for Sabbath rest and worship. Four of those men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. And even though they did not sin as most of Judah did, they nevertheless suffered along with other covenant people for these covenant sins. As we begin our study of Daniel, we will look today at these men of true faith, men of substance, who, by their acts of faith, would make their words believable to the Jews.

But first, some background on this book: Daniel lived before, during, and after the Babylonian captivity 俘. He wrote about what would happen in the near future so that the Jews who were experiencing God's judgment would find hope upon hearing that they would return to Judah. Daniel spoke of the distant future -Messiah would come, not only to restore them to God, but to bring the whole world under his blessed dominion. This also would have been a great encouragement to the people to know that God would still keep his covenant.

Our headings are: **Subjection 服从 of the Hebrew men to Service**, **Standing up to the Babylonian Styles** and **Serving God through the Babylonian System**.

Our goals are: That regardless of the circumstances of your **life, you will remember that you are a member of God's Covenant through Christ, and that you will faithfully serve him regardless of the conditions of your life and be a good example to others.**

Subjection of the Hebrew Young Men to Service

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged 围攻 it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. 3 Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, 4 young men in whom there was no blemish 污点, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. 6 Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

1. Because of Judah's continued sins: abandoning worship, ignoring of the weak, and becoming obsessed 痴迷 with their own pleasure and profit, God endeavored to give the land of Judah a proper Sabbath rest. This is why he said the Land would have rest for 70 years...7 being the day of rest.

Judah did not learn from the arrest and dispersion of the northern 10 ½ tribes of Israel in 722 BC by the Assyrians. They continued to “play the harlot.” So God cursed them to slavery so they might repent. God could have destroyed them permanently for their sin, but because of the covenant he made with Abraham, he kept the line of promise open for Christ to come. But make no doubt that this was by the ordination of God. You can see this from Verse 2 –God gave Judah and his people into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.

2. In order to take the city, the Babylonians besieged the city of Jerusalem and caused great suffering. They did not permit any trade in or out the city. Jerusalem fell first in 605 BC, in Nebuchadnezzar’s first year as king. There was a smaller uprising from Judah (around 594 BC) but it was quickly put down. In 586 BC, with a much greater uprising, the Babylonians came and **completely wiped out Judah.** These **4 men of faith** (but there were more) **were most likely taken** during the 1st invasion. At the same time, the **temple was raided** 搜查 and most, not all, of the precious things were taken and put into the temple of a pagan god. Israel trusted in the temple and not in their God so God had the temple in which they trusted destroyed. Worship virtually ceased in Jerusalem. How sad this must have been for the few faithful! How this would have angered God! Nothing makes God angrier than when his worship is perverted 反常. So God worked through the Babylonians to remove the things that the Jews were perverting!

3. These 4 men were impressed (forced) into the king’s service to learn the Babylonian language, history, politics, etc. The Babylonians wanted men who would be teachable and would adapt to the new cultures and religion. For sure Nebuchadnezzar wanted to boast about his power and use these men for display like trophies or achievements.

2Kings 20:17 `Behold, the days are coming when all that *is* in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 18 `And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'"

4. To encourage these 4 young men in their duties and studies and make them love their new country and work for it, they were to be treated well and fed better than the average person. This was like a bait 饵 (a lure) to try to get the Hebrew young men on the Babylonian side. They were ordered to eat from the king’s rations – delicacies 美食. But this food was no doubt inconsistent with the teaching of Jehovah who promoted moderation and healthy eating. Furthermore, from Babylonian history we learn that they ate an awful amount of meat. But you see the temptation –they knew that most men love meat! And young people, this is how the world tempts you. It promises you prosperity and happiness if you simply follow its way. If the fish knew what was in the bait, would he eat? And you know now! So don’t bite.

5. As part of this process of making these men forget their past and look more to their new country and “hopefully, their new gods, these 4 men were given pagan names. It is a shame we today call 3 of them by their pagan names!

a. Daniel (Elohim will Judge) was renamed (Belteshazzar (lord of the treasures; Bel is probably a form of Baal).

b. Hananiah (Jehovah is gracious) was renamed Shadrach (the great scribe or royal – from the Babylonian god “rach” or sun).

c. Mishael (who is like Elohim) was renamed Meshach (guest of a king; “shach” was a pagan god).

d. Azariah (Jehovah is my help) to Abednego (servant of Nebo, a pagan god).

Yet, when the Babylonians replaced the men’s godly names with pagan idolatrous names they could only change their name not their hearts.

6. What lessons can you learn from this covenant failure of God’s covenant people? Sin brings you into bad situations and forces you to make difficult choices and pressures you to compromise 妥协. Sin causes the innocent to suffer: your children to suffer...or your parents to suffer...your church to suffer or country to suffer.

Standing up to the Babylonians Styles

8 But Daniel **purposed in his heart** that he would not defile 污蔑 himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies 美食 nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs 太监 that he might not defile himself. 9 Now **God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill** of the chief of the eunuchs. 10 And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king." 11 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 "Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." 14 So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their features appeared **better and fatter in flesh** than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies. 16 Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

1. Daniel and his friends, being men of substance 实体 who believed in Jehovah God, refused to eat the king’s food for good reasons.

a. They did not want to defile themselves with forbidden ceremonials 仪式 foods – like pigs, or the fat of animals.

b. They did not want food that was not properly cooked... with the blood still in it.

c. They did not want to eat the food that was probably offered to idols first.

And even though wine was not forbidden, they it seems more possible that they rejected it because wine was seen as libation to the Babylonian gods. Often the Babylonians would pour a sip on the ground as an offering to their idols before drinking. Keep in mind that Daniel drank at other times and ate meat as well. (Daniel 10:3)

And notice that Daniel thought about this – realized it was sin and he then was determined not to sin against God by defiling himself with the food from the king’s table. Isn’t this what Moses did as well? He learned that there are times when one has to give up nice things for better things!

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

2. So Daniel and his Christian brothers gently challenged the eunuchs who cared for them asking **the eunuchs** to put them to the test to prove that God would honor them and keep them healthy if they refused to eat what they shouldn't. They asked to eat anything that was planted...grains...greens...etc. And the eunuchs, albeit reluctantly, agreed. If found out, or if the plan didn't work, the head eunuch would have lost his head. Why did the chief eunuch agree? **God was working in him.** Yes, Daniel worked (human responsibility) but God worked as well (sovereignty).

Psalm 106:46 He also made them to be pitied By all those who carried them away captive.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.

3. But don't mistake something here. **Daniel was not advocating 主张for vegetarianism 素食主义.** (Dan 10:3) Daniel, a prophet, was doing **this by the revelation 启示of God** in order to be a witness to these pagans. And they were doing this to preserve their testimony in front of their fellow Jews. And **don't make this type of call or expect similar results.** To do this by your own accord is to tempt God. (God, let me drive really fast, but let me not be pulled over by the cops! God, I know I must not marry a non-Christian, but I will just be friendly. Lord, show me a sign of whom I should marry. Bad! Very bad. God's Word must guide all your actions. Whatever you do, you must be able to say: "Thus says the Lord.")

4. At the end of 10 days 4 Jewish men appeared to be healthier and well-fed compared to those who ate from the king's table. But you see, it wasn't the substance of the food that made them look better, it was their strong faith in God. It is unlikely that that type of food would make one look fatter and fresher. Later they ate meat and drank wine.

Serving God through the Babylonian System

17 As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. 21 Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

1. Refusing to be defiled by the king's food and sinning against God, God honored these 4 men and blessed them in their studies... and he blessed them with wisdom. And he blessed Daniel with the gift of understanding and explaining dreams. They stood on principles and God blessed their stance.

Proverbs 22:29 Do you see a man *who* excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown *men*.

Even King Nebuchadnezzar confirmed the wisdom of these 4 men and rewarded them with good positions where they would serve the king and they would serve the King of kings in comfort. They were 10X better than the people of the land. Their studies benefitted them. God blessed them.

2. **What amazing providence of God.** Yes, these men (many from the royal family and nobles of Judah) were there in Babylon, in the midst of wicked men because of Israel's Covenant unfaithfulness. But yes, God put these men in privileged positions so they could be of service to the Jews as well. How? Their **providentially given high positions from Judah and in Babylon would have given them access to the people to speak God's words and influence over them** later when captivity was over. **And their act of faith would have made their prophetic words more believable** to the Jews so they would have faith that they would wait for their return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem...a temple that would be simpler than Solomon's temple, but one in which there would be greater glory. (Watching godly men eat vegetables a be fatter than the well-fed was a miracle of God.) Yes, the Jews had to "suck it up" and take their punishment, and not try to run away. But this would make it more believable when they saw their God making their men look better – even with worse food. You too are called to live in troublesome times in North America, but don't shy away from your responsibility to live like a Christian even when you are in Rome. Living faithfully...not talking like the pagans...not dressing like the pagans...not living loosely like the pagans...but being distinct in word and life, is **necessary for your good**, for the non-Christian's good, and for Christ's glory.

3. Isaiah confirmed the captivity by prophecy 200 years before when the Medo-Persians玛代波斯 were not even an empire, and Daniel lived till after captivity when the Medo-Persians under Cyrus destroyed Babylon. **God keeps his promises to judge and to save. No one can stop his hand.**
Isaiah 4:28 Who says of Cyrus, *'He is My shepherd,* And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

Conclusion:

There are 2 things at play here. **First, see the providential care of God.** God never left his church. He punished her for her sins, but he never left her. He made a promise to Adam, Noah, and Abraham and he kept his promise. Even while he punished his church he reassured her of his love through servants like Daniel, Ezekiel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Second, **these men of substance saw God's prophetic Word confirmed.** No wonder they had **courage to speak of their future to Jerusalem**—and of the Messiah and the unstoppable spreading of Messiah's kingdom throughout the world. No wonder they had the people had hope. No wonder they would live godly lives in the face of social pressures to change.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **First, an application from Judah's side:** Be assured of God's love even when you sin. No, God does not like it when you sin, but he still loves you because Christ was sinless for you. God will care for you even when he punishes you for your sin. He has a hedge around you...and says that the floods can go so far and no more. A child may refuse to wash his hands, then rubs his eyes and get sick, but his father doesn't expel him from the family. Rather, that father makes sure that child gets

better...even after enduring the medicines. Such is God's love for you. **But, second, and application from the 4 men of substance side:** Know that your life and your faith, gives power to what you say to the world and to your fellow Christians. When you live well you are more believable – especially to your children. So speak of God in the world with testimony and your life, despite the pressures to compromise and hurt your testimony. This will spread God's kingdom.

Finally, if you are not God's child, the only thing you will hear from God is: Depart from me you wicked worker and go to hell.” That is terror. It is worse than being blown up by a terrorist. It is worse than being shipwrecked 遇船难者 and sharks show up. It is a spiritual terror. But you can be saved from it, if you call on God to save you and make you his child because Christ died on the cross for sinners such as you.