

August 8

Daniel 1, 2

Today we are introduced to Daniel, a contemporary of the Prophet Ezekiel, who was transported into Babylonian exile at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's first trip to Jerusalem with a conquering army in 605 B.C. When Jehoiakim surrendered to the king of Babylon, the great king of Babylon decided not to destroy the city. He contented himself instead with extracting heavy tribute, stripping the temple of some of the more valuable items and taking the Judah's cream of the crop, young aristocrats as hostage.

Apparently the practice of the Babylonian overlords was to deport the young men with the greatest potential for leadership and put them into the diplomatic school of the empire. When (and if) they graduated they would be put into the service of the king in some portion of the empire far away from their native land. This policy accomplished two goals. First, it decreased the possibility that the land conquered by Babylon would rise up in successful revolt against the empire. By taking the young men with the greatest potential for leadership to Babylon, any future rebellion was already weakened by the loss of its best leaders. Secondly, if the aristocrats of the conquered lands adapted to their new environment, the Babylonian empire was given a tremendous pool of talented leaders from which to draw administrators for the various portions of the empire.

Into this pool Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were introduced. They were renamed for political and theological reasons. Politically, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make Babylonians out of them. He wanted them to lose their Hebrew roots. Theologically it was important because each Hebrew name expressed a piece of doctrinal belief about Jehovah the God of Israel. "Daniel" means my judge is God. His Babylonian name Beltshazzar means Bel is judge. Hananiah means Jehovah has shown grace. He becomes Shadrach, the command of Aku (a Sumerian moon god). Mishael (who is what God is) becomes Meshach who is what Aku is. And Azariah Jehovah has helped becomes Abednego or servant of Nego.

In chapter 1 the issue is compromise. Daniel and his friends are expected to eat the food of the king's tables. It was a diet for which most prisoners of war could only dream! But Daniel and his three friends do not want to indulge themselves because it would mean violating the dietary restrictions of Old Testament Judaism. Keep in mind that they were not the only exiles from Jerusalem. Many other young Israeli noblemen were also there and they apparently had decided that "when in Babylon, do as the Babylonians" -- so they swallowed their scruples with their meat. I am very sure that they found a way to rationalize their decision. After all they were prisoners and no one had given them any choice. Surely God would not want them to starve ... It is true they were not given any choice -- but they did not seek to find any alternative either. Daniel did and in this he and his three companions distinguished themselves as men of principle who were unwilling to compromise themselves for the sake of personal advancement.

God's willingness to honor the men who would not compromise their principles stands as a beacon to us -- and a reminder that the little choices do matter and God does notice how we handle the smaller issues in life. I am very sure of one thing. If Daniel and his friends had caved in on the little issue of diet, they would not have had the courage to stand tall in the challenges they faced later.

How are you doing in the 'little things'? Your expense reports. The way you use language. The way you talk about people behind their backs. The ways you spend your money. The places you surf on the internet? Little decisions add up big when it comes to character.

Chapter 2-

The power of prayer is seen in Daniel's plan for discovering the dream. His big job is not only to interpret the dream, but to do so without knowing the dream! Nebuchadnezzar wants a supernatural interpretation so he gives a test. So Daniel prays and solicits the prayer support of his three young friends. Daniel apparently went to sleep and was given the vision as he slept! Watch out as you are reading this Book -- when Daniel and his friends pray, God responds often in a very big way!!

The long range score of God's plan for redemption is illustrated here by the contents of the dream and there will be four empires: Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian is one, second the Medo-Persian Empire, the Alexandrian empire and the Roman one mixed with iron and clay. Later on in this amazing Book of prophecy, Daniel will predict with such remarkable accuracy the events which occurred after Alexander's empire was broken into four portions, that modern critics, unwilling to accept the phenomenon of fulfilled prophecy would post a date for the writing of this Book around 160 BC instead of in the sixth century BC when Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar actually lived and worked. Even that trick won't work, however, because Daniel's prophecies go on to speak of the Roman Empire and even of the exact time when Christ's ministry would begin. Later on we will see parts of this Book that look all the way down to the very end of the church age.

The final score of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is of great importance to us. A rock cut from a mountain becomes a fifth kingdom. It rolls down a mountain and smashes against the brittle feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image breaking it to pieces and grinding the image to dust which the wind blows away while the rock becomes a mountain that fills the earth. "The fifth God established kingdom is destined to endure forever -- a realm never to be destroyed. Not only Daniel 7, but parallel passages leave us in no doubt that this fifth realm is the kingdom of God, ruled over by Christ and enduring even after its earthly, millennial phases is over."