

DANIEL'S DECISION OF FAITH

Daniel 1:1-21

Key Verse: 1:8

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."

Many people study the book of Daniel with the assumption that it is prophecy concerning eschatology. But this book is the story of a few chosen people's lives of faith more than prophecies concerning future events. Chapter 1 mentions Israel's historical background of the time. Because of their sins, the people of Israel were being dragged into Babylonian captivity. Daniel was one of them. The situation of Israel was the most tragic and she was at her lowest point in history. In this situation, what did Daniel do? Let's study what Daniel did in a tragic and adverse situation.

I. When Israel did not maintain God's blessing (1,2)

Look at verse 1. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." Prior to this, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt destroyed Josiah (2 Ki 23:29-30), and then invaded Judah and appointed Jehoiakim king of Judah in place of his father. But there was a newly rising world power, the Babylonian Empire. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, routed the army of Egypt when the king of Egypt marched out to ally himself with Assyria in the battle of Carchemish (Jer 46:2). After that, Nebuchadnezzar went on to invade Jerusalem (605 B.C.). When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded, he killed huge collective masses of the people of Israel mercilessly. The holy Jerusalem was burned down to ashes. The holy temple was desecrated. Some of the articles from the temple of God were carried off by Nebuchadnezzar to the temple of his god in Babylon and were put in the treasure house of his god.

Why did this tragic event happen to God's chosen people? The first part of verse 2 says, "And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand." It seemed as if it were an international problem. But the author of Daniel says that it was a sovereign act of God. When God saw his people, they were corrupt and worthless. They needed divine discipline. Out of his divine love, God delivered his people into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. For God, it was an unbearably painful event. Of all the nations, God chose Israel to be his people. (Ex 19:5,6) They were God's covenant people. (Gen 17:7) God gave his promises to his people Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Most importantly, they were a priestly nation called to fill the earth with the knowledge of God, and thus fulfill God's plan of world salvation. As he had promised,

God brought them to the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey. God wanted them to live as God's chosen people and a priestly nation in the promised land so that they might win the Gentiles over to God. God gave marvelous grace to his people. But they did not maintain God's blessing.

Why did they not maintain God's blessing? It was because they abandoned God and his law. God taught them to seek God wherever they went. Deuteronomy 4:29 says, "But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul." God also promised that he would bless them when they sought God. Deuteronomy 6:10-12 says, "When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you--a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant--then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Jos 24:13) Even a child can understand that these verses teach his people to seek God. They should have sought God from their hearts. But when they saw the advanced civilization and cultural advantages in the promised land they began to pursue worldly things so nervously that they became worthless and useless.

God also taught them to love God when they would live in the promised land. Deuteronomy 6:5,6 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts." Did they love God living in the promised land? No! They did not love God; they loved the things of the world more than God. When they abandoned God the result was serious: They lost God's blessing. They wanted to live better, happier lives without God's interference. But things did not go as they had expected. They were driven into troubles caused by besetting enemies and by one disaster after another. God was their king. When they abandoned God they fell into anarchy.

They also could not maintain God's blessing because they did not fulfill their duty as a priestly nation. The other day God gave one shepherd a son. In this shepherd's heart, joy was overflowing and hope was shining like a rainbow. Likewise, God had a glorious purpose for his people. God had a glorious mission for his people to fulfill. God had an expectation for them to fulfill their duty as a priestly nation. But in the course of living in the promised land they were transposed into slaves of future security; they did not seek God even when they were oppressed by the world powers of the times. They only wanted to solve their problems by human means, not by God's help. If we want to live in God's blessing, then we must seek God and we must love God with all our hearts.

II. Daniel's decision of faith (3-16)

Nebuchadnezzar was a conqueror. He was also a wise man. When he took a lot of plunder from Jerusalem he also took some of the Israelites from the royal family and nobility, young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. (3,4) In short, he took with him the idea banks from Jerusalem to train them for the future service of his empire. Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. (6) The chief official gave them each the name of a Babylonian idol in an attempt to transform them into pro-Babylonians and to support Pax-Babylonia and to erase the traces of the Israelites. To Daniel he gave the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. (7) Even when their names were changed by invaders, they could not protest. They were utterly helpless to do anything.

It is certain that most people of Israel despaired and fell into self-pity. Probably some of them only tried to save their own skins. In this helpless situation Daniel had something to do for God. Look at verse 8. "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." In that tragic situation, Daniel was chosen by the king to be a fellow member of the royal academy with a promising position in the palace for his future. In a desperate situation, most smart people are in danger of becoming opportunists and being blinded by their selfishness. Daniel could have eaten royal food in the court and just studied. Humanly speaking, he was lucky. But he did not think he was lucky. He was sorrowful because of his people who were under God's wrath and anger. But he did not just sit down and cry about it. He sought God. In that tragic situation he loved God. As an expression of his love for God he did what he could do. He made a small decision of faith. It was not to eat royal food in order not to defile himself. For this, he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way; not to eat all kinds of luxurious royal food, but only vegetables and water. It was too presumptuous for a POW to make such a request. But God was with him when he made a decision of faith to live as a man of God. God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. But this time the official said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." (10) What the official said was negative. But Daniel did not give up. This time he turned to the guard who was in charge of them. Daniel pleaded with him. Look at verses 12,13, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So the guard agreed to what Daniel had said and gave them

vegetables and water only.

It is worthwhile to think about why Daniel made such a decision in that tragic situation. What benefit does it bring when a POW makes a decision of faith not to eat royal food? His resolution seems too small to change the world. Anyway he made a decision of faith. Obviously he resolved not to eat royal food in order to keep the dietary law based on Leviticus. There were many kinds of animals and fish that the people of Israel were forbidden to eat. (Lev 11) It is most obvious that he resolved not to eat royal food in order to keep his faith pure. As we know well, the people of Israel lived a wandering life without one place of settlement for 2,000 years. But they were able to survive as a nation such a long time because they had a firm resolution in their hearts to have faith in God. Daniel is one of their ancestors. He wanted to keep his faith pure. So from the beginning he made a small decision not to eat royal food.

Daniel's small decision seems to be a small matter, for he looked as if he were a little fish in the vast ocean. But when he made it before God, he became a useful person to God; otherwise he could have been one of the corrupted people. Daniel's decision of faith in that tragic situation was indeed great in the sight of God. One young man wanted to get a good score on his English test. So he stayed up late and tried to prepare for his English test. But he did not get a good score on the test because he only wanted to pass the test and lacked a burning desire to master English. Base desires cannot substitute for a decision. A decision must come from a noble desire. One young man almost finished his Ph.D. study in chemistry in a university. But he was not sure he had mastered chemistry. So he decided to quit the school he was in and to start his study all over again in a better school. The decision was costly. But he is now full of spirit.

Moses was in the palace of Egypt as a Hebrew-born. Moses made a decision of faith not to enjoy the pleasures of sin in the palace. His decision seemed small--but it was not. His decision made him grow as a leader over 600,000 Israelites after the Exodus. In this adulterous and perverse generation, we have to make many kinds of decisions of faith. But the most important decision is the decision to keep oneself pure before God. Psalm 24:3,4a says, "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...." One who can keep himself with a pure heart can keep his faith pure and inherit the kingdom of God. Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

One person, Daniel's, decision of faith was very significant for the people of Israel down through the generations. His decision illuminated his people with God's light whenever they were in a dark situation. Common people do not make any decision or commitment. But the people of God

must make a decision of faith to please God. Then God can bless us.

III. God was with Daniel (17-21)

In a tragic situation, Daniel made a decision of faith to live as a man of God. Then God blessed him. God was with him and gave him wisdom and sagacity that enabled him to understand all kinds of literature and learning. Verse 17b says, "And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds." God gave him spiritual eyes to understand spiritual things. God promised his people that whoever sought God and loved God in the promised land, God would be with them and bless them and make them a blessing. (Deut 28:1-14) This promise God kept to Daniel. God gave him what he really needed. Since he was chosen to be a fellow in the royal academy, he needed wisdom and understanding so that he might study better than others. This God gave him. On the other hand, if they became conceited, thinking that the strength of their hands had produced their wealth and did not remember God and God's blessing, they would surely be destroyed. (Deut 28:15-20) This is a spiritual secret: When we are in tragic situations we should not sit down to despair or fall into self-pity. We must seek God and love God with all our hearts. Then God gives us what we really need. One young woman doctor had arthritis and rheumatism in her body. All her past achievements and her husband's success seemed to be in vain. It seemed she was just to suffer from the pain of arthritis and rheumatism throughout her life. Her condition looked tragic. But she did not fall into self-pity. Instead, she decided to seek God and love God with all her heart. Dragging her painful body, she came to the Chong Ro center in Korea regularly and began to feed sheep. She went to the campus every day. Then God miraculously healed her arthritis and rheumatism, which was considered medically incurable. God filled her heart with the marvelous grace of God. She has been a blessing to others because of her decision. One young man made a decision of faith to go to Russia as a missionary. When the door of Russia was a little opened by Gorbachev's political principle, he went to Hungary first. There he got a three day tourist visa and went to Moscow. There, when he talked about his situation to a professor of MSU, the professor decided to admit him to the Ph.D. program in physics. God blessed his decision.

Many people complain about their human conditions. This is not wise. Like Daniel, we must seek God and love God. We must make a decision of faith to live a pure life before God. Then God gives us everything we need. Ephesians 1:18 says, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you...." This is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians to love God and seek God so that God would give them wisdom to do everything well and to have spiritual insight to see what God is doing.

Look at verses 18-20. After three years and at the appointed time, 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 the whole kingdom. When Daniel made a decision of faith to live a pure life, God blessed him and his friends to be the most excellent fellows in the royal academy. God made him become an eminent leader throughout his lifetime who served over eight kings.

In this chapter we learn that we must make a decision of faith to seek God and love God earnestly in any situation and God will give us wisdom and strength to overcome the world. Let's remember that one person's decision of faith can change the course of world history.