

Nebuchadnezzar's First Invasion of Judah

Daniel 1:1-21

Daniel 1:1-21 - *"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged 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, 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.

⁸ But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs 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.

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."

Background Notes

Daniel is one of the four major prophets of the Old Testament. The other three are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. In the Book of Daniel we are given a broad and comprehensive view of the flow of history “from here to eternity.” God’s plans and purposes for Israel are seen as a major part of this broad scope of history and prophecy.

In 605BC, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army defeated the allied forces of Assyria and Egypt at the landmark Battle of Carchemish. Later that year Nebuchadnezzar made his first of three invasions of Judah, and he besieged Jerusalem. Jehoiakim was king of Judah at this time.

In his first invasion of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar took the Temple treasures away to Babylon. In addition, he took captive a number of the up and coming young men of Judah, including young men of royalty and nobility. Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were among these choice captives. They were probably teenagers at the time. As a result of this complete and drastic change in Daniel’s life and surroundings and lifestyle, Daniel and the others were faced with some major decisions.

Doctrinal Points

1. It is not wrong for believers to adjust and accommodate in this world.

In our Lord’s high priestly prayer in John 17, the Lord prayed to the Father in reference to His disciples: *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”*¹⁶ *They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world”*(John 17:15-16). This is still the position of committed disciples today. We are to be **in** the world, but not **of** the world. There are two dangers in maintaining this required position.

The first danger is that by being in the world, we can get too involved with the world. We can get sucked into this world system and become worldly, with worldly values and attitudes. The second danger is that we are not involved enough in the world – we are so “not of this world” in our life and lifestyle that we fail to meet our responsibilities to the people of this world. This is the “so heavenly minded that you’re no earthly good” danger.

We see that Daniel had his act together in regard to this world. He adapted and adjusted and accommodated to his new situation in pagan Babylon, but he didn’t compromise in his faith. He was in the world, but not of the world. Daniel accepted the new Babylonian name that was given to him. He learned the language of Babylon -- we know this because Daniel wrote a significant portion of the book of Daniel in Aramaic. Daniel didn’t refuse to become “a student at the University of Babylon.” He studied hard and learned all about international politics. He graduated summa cum laude, as we see in the second half of this chapter!

God blessed the approach that Daniel took, and the lesson for us should be obvious. At times, we may find ourselves in new and different situations, cultures, or surroundings for any number of different reasons. We must adapt properly, but within biblical limits. It is not wrong for believers to adjust and accommodate in this world.

2. It is wrong for believers to compromise and conform to this world.

The majority of the captives probably reasoned that it was foolish to put their lives on the line when they were so far away from home, and up against such overwhelming odds. Why not lie low and conform to the Babylonian way of life? When in Babylon, do as the Babylonians do.

It seems that the majority of the captives reasoned this way, and they rationalized themselves right out of the will of God (Daniel 1:4-7). But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself (v8). Daniel knew from the Word of God that eating the foods at the king's "training table" was wrong. Not only did the Jewish Scriptures expressly forbid certain of those foods, but also the king's foods were probably dedicated to heathen idols. Eating and drinking the king's food would have involved Daniel in defiling pagan religious practices. Daniel would not compromise and disobey the Word of God. He knew that God doesn't water down his Word because of uncomfortable or tough or sticky situations.

God is pleased when we dare to be Daniels! Daniel didn't compromise in matters of the faith. Although Daniel adjusted and accommodated himself to his new environment, he didn't conform to Babylon. Babylon's goals didn't become Daniel's goals. Babylon's glories didn't become Daniel's glories. Babylon's gods didn't become Daniel's gods. Daniel didn't disobey the Word of God, he didn't compromise in his faith, and he didn't conform to this world. Daniel dared to stand faithful!" It is wrong for believers to compromise and conform to this world.

Practical Application

Dare to be a Daniel!

This is certainly an obvious practical application from this chapter, isn't it? I'm reading from the devotional I wrote, entitled "Dare to be a Daniel!" (The entire essay can be accessed on the GCM website.)

Daniel's stand was no doubt costly. Imagine the comments of the other captives--even Daniel's old buddies from home: "What's Daniel trying to prove anyhow? He's going to get us all killed!" "Here comes Deacon Daniel!" "Quit trying to play God, Daniel!" Imagine having to eat vegetables and water for three years (vs15-16) -- not too exciting! No, it wasn't easy, but Daniel made up his mind that he was going to be faithful to the Lord. He set the example and three others followed -- only three! A pitiful minority, but God blessed and honored those faithful few!

We don't read any more about the compromising captives, but we do read more about the faithful few. Read on in Daniel and see how God promoted these men and used them for His glory. We learn from verse 21 that Daniel outlived the Babylonian empire itself. (Cyrus was a king of the Persian Empire.) Notice how the Scripture seems to emphasize that Daniel **continued**--he continued to stand faithful to the Lord.

Right now some of you may be facing a situation similar to Daniel's. Maybe you've just started college or you've moved to a new town or started a new job. You're in a different environment -- maybe even a different culture. Everything has changed.

No one seems to talk about the Lord. Christians are definitely in the minority. "Home" is so far away. The pressure to conform to the new group is so great. It's so easy to compromise "just a little" in the faith. What should you do?

Dare to be a Daniel! Yes, it will be hard and costly and gutsy and very lonely at times. You may be laughed at by some, mocked by others, and ignored by many. The temptation to quit or lie low or crawl into your shell will be very strong. Don't yield! Struggle to be faithful!

Of course there will be changes. Any new situation brings adjustments. Some of you come from sheltered environments. Your horizons will be broadened. Daniel's certainly were. Your lifestyle will change some. God expects you to relate to the culture in which He places you. But God expects you to remain faithful to Him -- in your social life, in your sex life, in your spoken life.

Don't disobey the Word of God. Don't conform to this world's goals and glories and gods (read Romans 12:2). Don't compromise! Be faithful and **God** will bless you and honor you and use you for His glory. Dare to be a Daniel!