

Daniel One ~ The Test

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon into Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. VI,2

Now, Jehoiakim was a puppet king really having been set in power by the Egyptian Pharaoh. As such, the picture of truth for us is that spiritual power had departed from Judah long before this attack. Nebuchadnezzar, who throughout the book of Daniel represents the world, did in no way overcome God, for Judah had long left the Lord.

Nevertheless, under Pharaoh, Judah had a false sense of security. It is the same today with God's people who, for any reason, turn from the invisible God to the material powers of 'Pharaoh' so to speak. There may ensue a period of seeming security but when the real trouble hits, pharaoh is nowhere to be found. You might say that the common thread to vulnerability and calamity is alienation from God. Judah was alienated from God because the people had opened the door to spiritual idolatry and had neglected to

give the land its Sabbath rest for 70 years.

Yet, you may think, 'But why did God allow them to take the sacred vessels to Babylon? Doesn't that tell the Jews and their enemies that He's weak or uncaring?' Often times, as believers, we are challenged in our faith when we see the enemy apparently victorious. We can, in such a state, listen to the lies of the slesse-tongued serpent and hang our heads in defeat. You see, our minds are so small and our perception so limited, we think in terms of the immediate and see only the surface of circumstances. God, nonetheless, is always at work in behalf of His children.

Yes, God allowed them to pirate these sacred vessels but they were the very instruments of their undoing – in chapter five of this book, we'll see the king of Babylon presumptuously bring them into his banquet to use in his drunken orgy and that's when the ax fell. That very night, he was killed and his kingdom taken over by the Medes and Persians. Later, the Jews who returned to Israel under the authority of the new king brought with them these same sacred vessels. God was always in control and caused the pride of man to ultimately crumble.

The lesson is clear. Never stop trusting in God even when you seem to be on the losing end of things, when things don't go 'right' in your eyes. It was the lesson

John the Baptist was learning in his prison cell as Jesus told his messengers, "*Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (Mat 11:4-6 emphasis mine) It was and is the 'final exam' of many martyrs. No one beats the rap – we all have to learn it.*

And the king spoke 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; Children in whom [was] no blemish, but well favored, 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, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. V3-5

Recall that the king, Nebuchadnezzar is a pictorial representation of the world for us. As such, you can see in these verses the target of his plans and his goals. The 'world' wants our children. Or should I say, God's

children. Generally, the process is one of wooing, of alluring them into the place of vulnerability, then compromise, then apathy and then allegiance with the bully-power of this world.

And the process is multi-faceted. Forced education camps called public schools in which the standard indoctrination includes the denigration of Christianity, the elevation of erroneous theories, perverted values and the introduction of contemporary amorality.

In addition, there is the massive, unrelenting bombardment of 'a new tongue'. That is, the communication, the language and concepts of 'Babylon'. It spews forth from the depths of Hollywood (and the media in general) into the homes and minds of everyone. And it continually devolves those who give it heed. Of course, the wicked king wants everyone to speak this tongue, to think within the confines of his own diminishing mind.

Then there's the 'king's food'. High fat, loaded with carbs – tastes great. However, it represented a compromise of values. God's children are presented everyday with the same spiritual decisions and in the next verses we'll see how Daniel and his friends dealt with the situation.

Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel [the name] of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of

Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego. V6,7

The name Daniel (meaning God is my judge) was changed to Belteshazzar (meaning Bel's prince). The name Hannaniah (meaning Beloved by the LORD) was changed to Shadrach (meaning Illumined by Sun-god). The name Mishael (meaning Who is as God) was changed to Meshach (meaning Who is like Venus). The name Azariah (meaning The LORD is my help) was changed to Abed-Nego (meaning Servant of Nego).

Now, we must understand that names in the ancient world were not chosen because they sounded cool or trendy but rather implied character. To change their names was in effect an attempt to make them identify themselves with another god and thus to change their characters. When you recognize this, the lesson is entirely contemporary, isn't it?

Notice how all the new names center on Bel. As it turns out, this goes all the way back to Nimrod, who built Babel or Babylon. He conceived a one world government model in rebellion against Jehovah-God and went about to establish a one world government in the land of Shinar (which is today known as Iraq) and institute a pagan worship system that rejected the Lord God Jehovah. The primary false god worshipped was called Baal (Syrian & Phoenician), Bel (Assyrian), Moloch or Molech (Ammonites), Ra or Re (Egyptian) to name just a few.

Nimrod incorporated into his worship system the grisly practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism. Alexander Hislop says, "the priests of Nimrod or Baal were necessarily required to eat of the human sacrifices; and thus it has come to pass that Cahna-Bal (cahna meaning priest & Bal referring to Baal), the Priest of Baal is the established word (cannibal) in our own tongue for a devourer of human flesh." That's what Baal (Moloch), or Bel worshippers did. They would also burn their children in sacrificial fires to receive blessings of pleasure from the diety. God spoke of this to Jeremiah the prophet when He said about the vile practice of the Jews of the time, *They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spoke it, neither came it into my mind. (Jer 19:5)*

Pleasures and delicacies are likewise today sought after at the expense of God's children. If we will 'sacrifice them to Bel', either in the womb or afterwards, we are named with new names so to speak, fitted with rancid, self-obsessed characters. 'Nebuchadnezzar's' tactics haven't changed.

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. Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which [are] of your sort? Then shall you make [me] endanger my head to the king.

Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, prove thy servants, I beseech you, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before you, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou see, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. V8-16

The biggest lesson for us in this section is found in the first six words – But Daniel purposed in his heart. (Psa 17:3, Eph 3:11) The word 'purposed' is in the imperfect

tense which means that it was not a one time event but ongoing. It is this purposing or determining within the heart of every believer that God desires and blesses. It is our part, while His is to do the rest. He provides the way, the truth and the life. He leads, He counsels, He strengthens, He forgives, He restores,... on and on it goes. But our part is to purpose in our heart all along the way. The fruit of which is trusting obedience.

Of course, if our 'purposing is at cross purposes' with the Lord, the fruit will be disappointment and distrust. What does the scripture say? What is His Spirit telling us? They will always be in harmony and their instruction must be the basis for what we purpose in our hearts.

Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. It wasn't a scheme or a schmooze that brought this favor but rather God. It was Daniel's part to purpose in his heart; he knew that his Lord would do the rest.

And the rest included a test. Now, as we study the book of Daniel, we can see a strong figurative relationship between the person of Daniel and the entity of the church. It is a striking similarity and not, I suggest, coincidental. In like manner, Daniel's three friends picture the faithful remnant of Jewish believers; so, with the four of them, we have prophetically pictured the congregation of the righteous in

Christ. We'll examine this in more detail later.

However, testing is a fundamental part of every believer's walk of faith – from Abraham to you and I, God proves us to perfect us. In this case, the test was for ten days and had to do with their diet as well as their countenance. It is interesting that they chose a ten day period of time for the number ten is associated with testing in the Bible. For example:

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:10)

...all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice... (Num 14:22)

But perhaps the more important aspect was what they chose to eat. Pulse refers to all kinds of grains and plants, not strictly vegetables. Basically, this was a vegetarian diet, chosen because none of the meat was butchered in a kosher manner or was sacrificed to idols. There are many good commentary explanations for their choice that relate to kosher standards but we are looking more at the pictorial lessons and thus will consider their food from that angle. Now, depending upon your translation, they asked to eat “pulse” or “vegetables” but the original word is derived from the verb that literally

means, “to sow, scatter seed” and as such reminds us of the parable that Jesus told in Matthew 13 wherein he declared that the scattered seed was the Word of God.

So in figure or type, the boys, i.e. the believers, were purposing to dine upon the Word of God as opposed to the ‘king’s food’ and were confident that their appearance would be fairer because of it. Of course, in a spiritual sense, the ‘king’s food’ today is pumped at us continually through the media. But, like these fellows, if we purpose to take in to our minds the Word of God instead – our spiritual appearance will indeed be “fairer and fatter” so to speak.

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. 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.

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. 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. And

Daniel continued [even] unto the first year of king Cyrus. V17-21

The psalms record, “*Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them. The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. The entirety of Your word is truth, ... my heart stands in awe of Your word... I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure.*” (Psa 119:97,98,129,130,160,161,162)

I submit that God did not give them guys knowledge and skill by way of the veggies they ate but He will give such understanding as we dine upon His Word.

Finally, there is likely some prophetic significance in that Daniel continued to be in a powerful position from Nebuchadnezzar all the way to Cyrus. That means his influence upon the world's governing powers transcended empires. In fact, it was under Cyrus' rule that Daniel came to understand the prophecies of Jeremiah concerning the 70 years of being cast out of the land of Israel. His influence was important in convincing Cyrus the Persian king to allow the Jews to return to their land. And then Daniel disappears – his ministry is over.

In like manner, the church has been influential in the world during the age of grace, transcending

empires, and was a strong influence in promoting to the world community the return of the modern day Jews to the land of Israel. In 1891, William Eugene Blackstone, a prominent tycoon, lobbied President Benjamin Harrison for the restoration of the Jews, in a petition signed by over 400 prominent Americans that became known as the Blackstone Memorial.

In the United States, the evangelical Cyrus Scofield, promoted the doctrine that Jesus could not return to reign on Earth until certain events occurred. In the interim, prior to these last days events, Scofield's system taught that the Christian church was primarily for the salvation of the Gentiles, and that according to God's plan the Jewish people are under a different dispensation of God's grace, which has been *put out of gear* so to speak, until the last days when the Christian Church will be removed from the earth by a miracle called the Rapture.

Scofield writing in the 1900s said that, in the last days, the Bible predicts the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and particularly to Jerusalem. Scofield further predicted that the Temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt - signalling the very end of the Church Age when the Antichrist would arise, and all who seek to keep the covenant with God will acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah in defiance of the Antichrist.

And thus as with Daniel in the time of Cyrus, the ministry era of the mostly gentile church is drawing to a close quite soon.