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Daniel in Babylon
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Dear Radio Friends,

The Christian life in this sinful world and society is difficult. God has called us out of this world to be a people consecrated to His cause in this world. Yet He places us in the midst of this sinful world to be a witness to Him and His workings of grace in us. That means we are called to live in this world of sin—a world that is opposed to the cause of Jesus Christ. We are called by God to live in a world where temptations abound and where all kinds of sins are at our fingertips.

That makes life in this present world very difficult. The command we receive is to step out of the ways in which this wicked world walks and be separate. There is no better example than that of Daniel and his three friends, who were called to live in this way in the midst of the wicked city of Babylon.

Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were taken from their godly homes and fami-

lies to the palace of the great king of Babylon, king Nebuchadnezzar. The intent of Nebuchadnezzar was to teach them the learning of the Chaldeans so that they could eventually be numbered among the wise men of Babylon.

And it was while they were there in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar that these young men were sorely tested. They were placed before all the sins and temptations of this world.

The verse that we are going to consider today is Daniel 1:8. It shows to us the godly resolve of Daniel. We read, “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.” This godly resolve of Daniel and his friends is what we wish to consider. It is this godly resolve that we want to serve as an example to us.

There are a number of facts concerning Daniel that

we learn from the first chapter of Daniel. We read of him and of his three friends, in verse 4, that they were children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and had ability in them to stand in the king's palace. We learn from this verse, first of all, that these four friends were young men. They are called children here in this verse, but the Hebrew term used here for children actually refers to young men who had just entered into their youth. So it is safe to assume that Daniel was about 14 or 15 years old when taken from his home and family and brought now to live in the palace of a king. And, since we learn in verse 5 of this chapter that he was to be taught in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar for the next three years, Daniel spent from age 15 to 18 approximately, that is, his teenage years, away from home, living and learning in a heathen world. He, together with his friends, were men who were still in the strength of youth. Their whole adult life was ahead of them. That we learn in the first place.

In the second place, Daniel had everything going for him from an earthly point of view. He had no outward blemish

but was well favored. In other words, he was a good-looking young man. Physically he was in top condition, and he was handsome besides—the kind of young man that young women might be attracted to at first glance. Besides this, we learn that he was skillful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, he was intellectually quick to understand science. Daniel was no slouch when it came to the natural ability to learn and apply the principles of the sciences. He was a student. So, he was handsome, in peak physical condition, and he had the smarts. He had it all. If anyone could get ahead in this present world, he could.

But there is something more important about Daniel that far, far surpasses any of these physical and intellectual characteristics. He was a child of the covenant.

We learn in verse three that he was not only of the children of Israel, but of the king's seed. This Scripture teaches us that Daniel was not only one of the covenant seed of Israel but was a descendant of David himself. He was of the seed-royal. Now I realize that this does not necessarily make a person a child of God. I mean, there are many who are born into the church and covenant who, although

outwardly living within the sphere of the church, nevertheless are not true believers. That was true of many of David's sons. They were wicked and unbelieving.

But this fact is significant when we learn in our text of the faith of this young man with his friends. Daniel and his three friends were born and raised in the sphere of the church. They were raised in covenant families and they had been well taught by the age of 14 or 15 in the ways of God. That means they were taught from childhood on in the fear of the Lord. And it is evident already from this chapter that Daniel and his friends loved God. That is by far the best characteristic of this young man. He could be the most handsome guy around; he could have been the best of the athletes on the team. He could have been the most popular guy in school—strong, witty, great personality, intelligent. But none of that means one little thing in itself. Nothing at all. All that is, is vanity. What made Daniel a young man worth remembering was his love for and devotion to God.

For, you see, Daniel was taken from his home and family during some of the most vulnerable years of his life. And he was placed smack dab

in the middle of the heathen world. Because of his natural abilities, he was taken (and again, that is true of his three friends too) to the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. The reason for this is that the king wanted young men who could be easily trained in the writings and languages of the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to teach young men who are usually, in their youth, open to new and different teachings and the wisdom of the world. Nebuchadnezzar, you see, was not ignorant. He knew that if he were to take from a home those who usually in the foolishness and pride of their youth seek to establish their own independence, then these would be as open vessels into which he could pour his own philosophy of life. He wanted young men who would seek together with him the ways of the world in its wisdom.

So Daniel was taken to the palace of the king and was appointed by the king a portion of the king's meat and wine. That means that this young man had everything at his fingertips there in the palace. He could indulge in its parties. He could indulge in the banquetings of the palace. He could have gotten drunk if he wanted. Daniel could have enjoyed the pleasures, perhaps, of any young woman in

court. It was all there at his fingertips. He could have had it all if he wanted it. And there was no one around, mind you, to tell him no—no parents, no elders of his people, no relatives. He could have it all and no one would know—except, of course, God.

Hey, this was Babylon. It was far away from Jerusalem. It was a world-center. And it was, therefore, a center of heathendom. This young believer lived right in the heart of unbelief. This young man, who belonged to the cause and covenant of Jehovah, was suddenly taken out of his own home, his sheltered little world, and put right in the middle of the kingdom of this world. Talk about the odds! Daniel personifies the odds. The wicked world far outnumbered the church. God's people are but few and weak in comparison to the wicked world in which they are called to live. And, let's face it, our sinful flesh is drawn towards the works of this world. This young man would have to refuse the wicked world not only, but also his own sinful flesh.

And that is *our* calling, too. Maybe this word of God ought to be applied even more particularly to young men and women. That is *your* calling, too. You and I, just like Daniel,

must love God. That is what God says to us. "Love not the world, neither the things in the world: the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. What concord has light with darkness? Ye are in the world, but not of the world." Daniel must have felt that keenly when sitting each day in the palace of the king of Babylon.

What would you have done if you were he? Young man, young woman, what would you have done if you were placed in that similar circumstance? Daniel did not want to be torn from home and family to live in the world. And yet today many a young person is anxious to leave supervision of mother and father to go live somewhere in that world. What would you do, young men and women, if you were all alone in this wicked world with all of its sinful pleasures at your disposal? What would you do?

We are told what Daniel did, in verse 8 of this chapter. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." Daniel said No to this world and its sin and he walked in obedience to his God.

But we might say, "What was so evil in eating a portion of the king's meat and drink-

ing of the portion of the wine,” because that was, after all, how he sought not to defile himself. It says there in verse 8: “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,” with the eating of these things.

Why was that such a big deal? I mean, it was a little thing, it was an insignificant thing. Daniel had to live, after all. It was not as if Nebuchadnezzar was forcing Daniel to live a life of debauchery and drunkenness there in his palace. Daniel was not being forced to take part in all of these things that were going on in the palace. All that Nebuchadnezzar required of Daniel was that he and his friends eat the food prepared for them and drink the portion of wine allotted to them. What was wrong with that?

Well, in order for us to understand that, we have to bear in mind the time in which Daniel lived. He was a member of the Old Testament church. That meant that Daniel was not allowed, by Jewish law, to eat or drink any portion of the king’s meat and wine, because that meat and that wine was consecrated each morning and offered in

worship to his idol god (probably Marduk) before that food was distributed to everyone in his court. We must not forget that Nebuchadnezzar worshiped that god to whom he had dedicated Daniel and other captives when they had arrived in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar did not love Jehovah. His priests did not serve Jehovah. Each day, as a morning sacrifice, the king’s meat and drink were all dedicated to his god.

Now the saints of God, under the law of Moses, were not allowed to eat and drink of that food dedicated to the service of an idol god. That would be a violation of the first commandment. So here was a real test of Daniel’s, and his friends’, faith. It was not as if he was given a choice of eating it or not. He had to eat it. The king himself had appointed that portion. Not to eat of that food of the king would be a direct insult and, no doubt, would be punishable by death. No one could defy the king’s orders and live.

Now, how easy it would have been for Daniel simply to use the excuse that he was being forced to eat it, so that he really was not responsible for his actions. As I said, it seems like a really small issue. This order of the king, therefore, constituted a real

temptation for this young man. What was he to do?

Again, we too are faced with that question oftentimes. What would we have done? Usually the temptations that we confront in this world are at least not forced upon us like this one was on Daniel. And, yet, sometimes we do stand under the pressure of peers. They put the pressure on us, do they not, to participate in their sin. And though we are not forced to walk in that sin with them, perhaps we almost feel forced to do it in order to be accepted by them. What do we do? We are being forced, or so it seems. Surely God will not hold us responsible for this sin, will He?

And then, there is always the authority God has placed over us. There are parents. There is the church. These, at least, are here saying to you and to me, "You may not do these things." Daniel did not even have this. He had no one to help restrain him from giving in to the temptation placed before him. No one would know what he ate or drank. And, surely, to refuse this would mean certain death for him.

But Daniel had already purposed in his own heart that he would not give in, even if this cost him his life. He would not defile himself with the sin

of this wicked world. He would not.

What made Daniel so bold? How was he able to stand up to these mighty men of court? Did he have that bold of a nature? I mean, sometimes that is true. A person has this bold nature and is able, it seems, to take a stand over against anything, no matter what the odds.

Well, Daniel's boldness did not reside in his character or nature. We are told in verse 8 that his boldness resided in his heart. In the heart of Daniel a miraculous work had taken place. It was the work of regeneration. God had delivered Daniel from spiritual death, you see, and had instilled in his heart a new life. In his heart, Daniel was drawn to the Messiah that was to come. By faith, he was united to Jesus Christ. The life of Christ already was in the heart of Daniel. God had taken hold of Daniel's heart and translated him in the very depth of his existence, infusing into him the qualities of a life rooted in Jesus Christ alone. He believed. And, quite obviously, that was not a fake faith—a faith that sometimes people feign when they are in the presence of others. This was a true faith, a faith by which he knew God and he trusted God. He was convicted

in his heart, therefore, that he had been set aside by God to a life of godliness and holiness, and that he must live that life of godliness and holiness in this world. He was so dedicated and consecrated to serving God that, even if that meant death to him, he was willing to die. After all, God had forgiven him of his sins. And he knew that One who was to come would make the deliverance, eternal deliverance, from punishment. It did not matter what happened to his body. His soul belonged to God. And he was dedicated to serving that God.

In his heart, therefore, Daniel hated sin. He hated Satan. And he hated the temptations of the wicked world that were now being placed before him. He resolved in his heart, we are told, that he would not walk in the sinful ways of the world. It was the heart, therefore, of Daniel that, of course, was the object of God's grace, a heart where the Spirit of Christ resided, and that determined his course of action. It was his faith. Even God's people who by nature can be very timid and quiet and unsure of themselves, nevertheless, have made a solid and unwavering stand in this world because they believed in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is that same faith that

motivates the child of God today to stand in the face of all temptation and say, "No! I will not go along with the sins of this world." And that is a faith that belongs not only to old men and old women. It is not a faith that dwells only in the hearts of fathers and mothers of the church. It is a faith that resides in the hearts of young men and young women, too. Is that faith yours?

We must purpose in our hearts that we will not defile ourselves with the sins of the wicked, but we will serve our God faithfully and fully, nothing wavering.

So, Daniel puts his request before Ashpenaz, the one who had been given charge of Daniel and his friends. Daniel persuaded him to allow himself and his three friends to eat only pulse (i.e., vegetables) and water. For ten days they were to try this. Then, after ten days, Ashpenaz could again check to see whether these young men were healthy. After ten days he came back and found that Daniel and his three friends were the healthiest of all the students in the school of Nebuchadnezzar.

And then, mind you, God even further rewarded this faithfulness. We are told in verses 18-20 of Daniel 1: "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 inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.” God rewarded them for their faithfulness.

And God blesses us, too. No, that does not mean that we will not be shunned or ridiculed in this world for our faith. It does not even mean that we will escape persecution for our faith in Christ. God does not always reward with an earthly reward as He did with these young men. But God does reward faithfulness. In His grace—because that reward, remember, is always of God’s grace—God will say to us in the day of days: “Enter into the joy of my rest.” Though no earthly reward is given, peace and contentment and even joy are given us in this life. And God will ultimately, in His grace, say to us: “Enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

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God grant to us the grace to dare to be a Daniel—to stand firm in the faith. Let us purpose in our hearts not to be defiled with the lusts of this present world. Young men and women who are listening, may you stand side by side with Daniel, your peer, and be numbered among the soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray together.

Gracious and eternal Father, we thank Thee again for Thy Word, a Word that reminds us of our calling as soldiers of Christ in this world to stand against the sin and the pollution of the wicked world around us. May we dare to be a Daniel. Work in our hearts by Thy grace and Thy Spirit that we might indeed go forth as Thy children in this world and take a bold stand of faith. Forgive us of all sin, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.