

DANIEL, ONE OF GOD'S FAITHFUL YOUNG MEN

Daniel 1:1-21; 2 :1-47
LESSON 419 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour" (Proverbs 21:21).

Dwindling Power

At the close of King Solomon's reign, Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom bearing the name of Israel, and the southern kingdom the name of Judah. From that time on, they continued to lose power until the northern kingdom was carried into captivity by the Assyrians in 721 B. C. Judah continued to be a nation about 100 years longer, but by the time Babylon became a world power, Judah's sins had become so great that God let them be taken captive, too. The people whom God had chosen to preach His religion, and to whom He had promised power over all other nations if they would obey Him, were in bondage to a God-rejecting government because they had turned from God.

God's Punishment

It happened many times during Israel's history that if they did not obey God He would send heathen nations to punish them. It came about this time that God used Nebuchadnezzar, and "gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand."

Some people think that God is too kind to punish the sinner, but the Bible has given many warnings of what God will do in judgment if people refuse to obey Him. Hell will be their eternal destiny if they do not repent. Hell was not made for man, but if man refuses to prepare For Heaven, He will have to go to hell.

Obedient Children

The nation of Judah was being punished, but among the captives who were taken to Babylon from Jerusalem were some young men who still trusted God. Our surroundings will never become so evil but that God can keep the faithful ones who want to be kept. The darker the sin around us becomes, the brighter will glow the Light of the world who is in the heart of the Christian. With Jesus in us, and our purpose firm to live for Him, we can conquer every power of Satan. God wants His people to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

Brilliant Students

One day Nebuchadnezzar asked for certain of the captives who were of royal birth to be brought to him. Just as in our day when young people of high intelligence are sought out to train for scientific work, he wanted the most brilliant men to learn the language and science of their day to help in the government. Among those who were chosen were Daniel and the three Hebrew children who were later named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Nebuchadnezzar changed their names, but he could not change their hearts. They remained true to their God.

These fine young men were given a place at the palace to live, food from the king's table to eat, and servants to wait on them. But Daniel had purposed not to defile himself with the king's meat, and he spoke for all four of them who were obedient to God. The luxury of the king's court did not turn their heads nor make them desire sinful pleasure. They preferred simple living; and besides, some of that food might have been offered to heathen gods before it was given them to eat.

The head of the servants, Melzar, loved Daniel. He would have selected the best of everything for him, but Daniel knew that it took more than the good things in this life to make him strong for the Lord. Melzar was afraid that the king might punish him if those he was taking care of should become thin and pale from their vegetable diet. Daniel asked for a test. He asked Melzar to let them try the pulse-and-water diet for ten days, then judge if it was good enough for them. "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" (Daniel 1:15).

Besides, God gave them wisdom in all the things they had to study. At the end of their schooling period, all those who had been studying at the king's court were called before him for an examination. The four who had determined to obey God were at the head of the class and were asked to stand before the king to be matched against the magicians and astrologers of Babylon. They were found to be ten times as brilliant as the Babylonians. In addition to their learning, God had given Daniel the gift of understanding visions and dreams. As a reward, all four of the Hebrew children were given government positions.

Troubled Sleep

Nebuchadnezzar had conquered most of the known world, had riches and honor, could make almost everyone bow to his will, and yet he worried about the future; and it spoiled his sleep. If he had been trusting God, he would not have had to worry. God would have taken care of him and his kingdom. We who are servants of Jesus today do not worry about the future of the world, whether communism will conquer the world, or some other evil power will bring destruction to our land. We trust God to take care of His own. If we must die for our faith, we will have a glorious entrance into Heaven. Jesus will welcome us Home as He did Stephen when he was martyred (Acts 7:55, 56).

The Psalmist said of Christians: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD" (Psalm 112:7). In Proverbs 3:24 we read: "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." The Apostle Peter asked this question: "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" (I Peter 3:13).

But what does the Scripture say about the sleep of the wicked? "In the morning thou shalt say. Would God it were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see" (Deuteronomy 28:67). "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). "For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night" (Ecclesiastes 2:23). "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isaiah 57:20).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

One night Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream that troubled him, but when he awoke in the morning he could not remember what it was. He felt it must be important, so he called in his magicians to tell him what the dream was and what it meant. The magicians were horrified. They said that no king should ask such a thing. They would have been glad to try to interpret the dream if they knew what it was, but they had nothing to start with.

The king had always had his own way, and he was very unreasonable. He said if no one was able to tell him his dream he would kill all the magicians and wise men in the kingdom. A servant started to carry out the orders of murder; and the captain of the king's guard came to Daniel and the three Hebrew children to lead them off to execution. It seems the king had forgotten about Daniel and he had never been asked to interpret the dream. He quickly went to the king and asked for a little time. Then he went home and asked the other three to pray with him that the Lord would reveal the secret to them so they would not be killed. Because they had always obeyed God and had lived to please Him, they had confidence that He would hear and answer their prayer.

In the night God showed Daniel what the dream was and what it meant; and how happy he was! He praised God for His goodness and kindness to them. He glorified God for answering his prayer. We should never forget to be grateful when God does something for us, especially when He answers our prayers.

Not only did God's interpretation of the dream save the lives of many, but it foretold the future for hundreds of years. God had it in His power to set up the kings who would reign in years to come. In Daniel's prayer of gratitude he said: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things" (Daniel 2:20-22) Daniel understood that "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). God puts up whom He will and puts down whom He will.

The Dream

Daniel was taken to the king and explained to him: "The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Then he went on to tell the king exactly what his dream had been, and what it meant.

The king had dreamed about a large statue which had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay mixed. As the king looked at it, a stone was cut out without hands which rolled over the statue and crushed it to powder so fine that it was carried away by the wind until there was nothing left. The stone then became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The Interpretation

Daniel then explained the meaning. He reminded the king that though he was king of all kings, all-powerful throughout his vast kingdom, yet that power and strength had been given to him by God. God had made him ruler over all people, no matter where they lived. So he was the head of gold. But his kingdom would not last forever. The next world power would

not be so strong. They were the Medes and Persians and were illustrated in the statue by the arms of silver. Many years later the Greeks conquered the world. They were the thighs of brass. The Roman empire came next, very strong and harsh. The Romans were pictured by the legs of iron. From the fall of the Roman empire there has been no world power. No doubt the toes of iron mixed with clay are the strong and weak nations of today which cannot unite as one, for iron and clay do not stick together.

The stone that was cut out without hands is Jesus. One day He will come again, strike down all earthly rulers, and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. All remembrance of the kingdoms that have once ruled the world will be gone, blown away like the dust on a summer threshing floor. The things of this world are nothing compared with the Kingdom of God. How important it is to be ready to rule and reign with Jesus when He comes again and His righteous kingdom reaches from shore to shore in every land!

God Honored and Daniel Promoted

Nebuchadnezzar was so grateful to Daniel that he fell on his face before him; but more important, he said: "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets." He did give God the glory. He also rewarded Daniel and the three Hebrew children by making them rulers in Babylon.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Where did Daniel and his friends come from?
- 2 Why were they chosen to live in the palace?
- 3 What did they determine not to do?
- 4 How well did they do in their examinations? Where did they go to work?
- 5 Why was Nebuchadnezzar troubled when he went to bed?
- 6 What did the king plan to do to the astrologers and magicians because they could not reveal his dream?
- 7 Who could interpret the dream? How did he get the wisdom?
- 8 Who was the head of gold? The arms of silver? The thighs of brass?
- 9 What was the stone that was cut out without hands, and what did it become?
- 10 What will happen to all other nations when Jesus comes to reign?