DANIEL’S RESOLUTION

Daniel 8:1-21

Key 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.”

Thank God for granting us an opportunity to study the book of Daniel. This book is about a prophet and his prophecies, a man of God and his message of the coming kingdoms of the world to the end time, the panorama of the history of the world to its consummation. Daniel was an exile in Babylonia in his youth, but overcame the culture and power of the great Babylonian empire with faith in the LORD God, the sovereign Ruler of history. His life of faith influenced not only his people in Babylonian captivity, but kings of Babylon and of Mede-Persia and the coming future world through his amazing prophecies. Jesus said in Matthew 24:15, “…spoken of through the prophet Daniel—Let the reader understand—” How fitting our study of Daniel can be as we live in this world of human power, awaiting our Lord Jesus’ coming again! It shows how a man who sees the future can live to the glory of God in the present. May God richly bless our study of Daniel and lead us to the God of Daniel.

Chapter one begins with these words, “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” According to 2 King 23:31-34, he became a king of Judah after his brother Jehoahaz, son of Josiah. His original name was Eliakim but Pharaoh Neco changed his name to Jehoiakim. He was an evil king, unlike his father Josiah, and reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. In the third year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Verse 2 says, “And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.” This tragic event was due to the sin of Judah, the sin of the king and the people. God punishes the sin of his people for his refining purpose. When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon carried some of the articles from the temple of God to the temple of his god and put them in the treasure house of his god, the god of Babylon seemed to domineer over the God of Judah his chosen people, to the great shame of the LORD God. Yet, the author made it clear that it was a sovereign act of the LORD. He is in control of the king of Judah and the king of Babylon as well, and is far above the gods of the world with no equal.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the 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). At that time there were three groups of deportations from Judah to Babylon, at three different times, 605, 597 and 586 BC. The event in this passage was the first group of captives including the four young men from Judah mentioned in this passage. They were picked up from the royal family and nobility. According to some historians around 50-75 young boys, not older than 17, or younger than 13 or 14 were selected as kind of hostages. There were three categories for the qualifications to be chosen: physical features, intellect and interpersonability. As for the physical features, with no physical defects and a handsome appearance; as for the brains, skillful in all wisdom, gifted in knowledge and understanding science. And they were all to have excellent social skills to serve in the king’s palace. They were really leadership material. The king was so brilliant that he wanted to raise these Jewish young men, who could assist him in administering the Jewish affairs. Verse 4 says continually, “He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.” The purpose of this royal academy was to brainwash by Babylonianization.

Then verse 5 says, “The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.” The Jewish young boys were not only privileged for the Babylonian palace education but also for Babylonian gourmet food, delicacies and rich food, and the very best wine. We all know that young boys have a vigorous appetite. It was to seduce them by their stomachs. These Jewish young boys could be the envy of many young people, though they were exiles. The king was willing to invest in the good for three years to produce the best. The king was brilliant and launched this great enterprise.

Something more is written concerning the king’s project. It says in verses 6 and 7, “Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Michael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.” At beginning of the royal education in Babylon, their names were changed. Why such a change? Let’s look into this change. The name Daniel means “God is judge” and this name was changed to “Belteshazzar” meaning “Bel/Baal provides”; or it could be “Bel’s prince.” “Hananiah” means “the Lord is gracious”, changed to “Shadrach”, which is some kind of a derivative from the god Akku, supposed to be the moon god, from which we get the word “Marduk”, another one of the chief deities of Babylon. “Mishael” means “who is what the Lord is”, that is, “Who is like the Lord?”, changed to “Meshach,” again from Mesha-Akku, which is “who is what Akku is?”  “Azariah” means “the Lord is my helper” changed to “Abednego” meaning “servant of Nego,” or “servant of Nebo,” and Nebo was the son of Baal.

As we see, these four men’s original names were surely given by their godly parent,s represented God. But the Babylonians substituted their beautiful godly names with the names related to their pagan deities. It was an attempt to blot out God from these young minds. What a dreadful scheme! It’s not unlike what universities and colleges are doing to young people today, full of the godless, atheistic, humanistic, socialistic information.

This brilliant project of the king would work in most young people chosen for the royal academy. They would think that they were climbing up the ladder of success in this land of opportunity, though they were exiles in Babylonia. However, this project would not work in Daniel and his friends.

Now verse 8 says, “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.” Wow! How could Daniel refuse the king’s offer of the royal food and wine? With this refusal, his life would be at a serious jeopardy, even losing his life. Yet, he did this, because he could not defile himself with the royal food and wine. Then how could this be defiling him? It was because at that time the royal food and wine were offered to the gods of the Babylon first before being brought to the king’s table. To Daniel, in his clear conscience before God, this was related to idolatry which God forbids. It was clearly disobeying God’s command. Especially God’s word specified what his people had to eat or not to eat in Leviticus chapter 11. As for Daniel keeping God’s word is more important than his life.

Then how about receiving Babylonian education? And his name being changed into Babylonian names connected to a Babylonian god? Would this be more serious than eating the royal food? As far as we know these two things are not directly related to the words of God. And probably Daniel thought that though he would be taught Babylonian subjects, it would affect his faith in God. He would just accept all the teachings but sort them out and rather would know how great the LORD God is, far superior to any Babylonians gods, as God said in Isaiah, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God” (Isa 45:5). Daniel also probably thought, “You can change my name, but cannot change my heart.” As for Daniel, these two things would not take away his faith in the LORD his God. But eating the food and drink the wine from king’s table every day would be related to his lifestyle and let him be absorbed into Babylonian ungodly culture gradually without his notice until his whole life was consumed by it. Most seriously, that was obviously disobeying God’s word, which is not permissible at all to Daniel. In other words, Daniel draw a clear line in his life, what to allow and what to not allow. He would not compromise in this matter whatsoever. It was because of his personal relationship with God. Daniels uncompromising spirit before the word of God was truly great, because of his love of God. We are reminded of Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Jesus said in John 14, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (15), “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me…” (21), and “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching…” (23).

We are living in this postmodern age and post Christian era. Each one claims each one’s own truth, saying, “There is no absolute truth.” Yet, however the world changes, the words of God are the unchanging truth, as Jesus said, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Peter said in 1 Peter 1:24-25, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.” One’s attitude toward the word of God is critical in one’s life. Apostle Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15-16 says, “how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” With a poor attitude before God’s word in the Scriptures there is no salvation for anyone. Men and women of God can be raised through the words of God in the Bible.

Again, what is important is to draw a clear line based on the absolute words of God in this ever compromising and relativistic and drastically changing world. As for some people, it can keep Sunday worship service absolutely according to one of the Ten Commandments, “Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy” (Ex 20:8). Eric Liddell (1902-1945), an English man was a 100-meter sprinter runner. He was chosen as a representative of England for the Olympic Games in Paris (1924). But it was found that he had to run on Sunday. His conscience was very clear before God and his word that he would not run the race at the great disappointment of his own country people. Even he was criticized a lot for caring only for his faith, not the people of his country. But he was firm in his faith. Then amazingly God opened a way for him to run 400-meter race, for a man dropped the race. Certainly, the game would not be on Sunday, but on the following Thursday. 400-meter running was not his best category and he had not prepared for this race. However, he ran by faith and won the race, obtaining the gold medal to the glory of God and a becoming great encouragement for his country people, testifying to them that God is living. God honoured and blessed his faith. 1 Samuel 2:30 says, “Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained.” Time and again a fatalistic thinking comes into my mind about disciple-raising and teaching and preaching the word of God. I often feels that I am not adequate, and the reality is so hard for this. I was tempted to give it up again and again. But I newly realize that it is not matter of my human ability, but of my obedience to God. The risen Jesus commanded, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). May I be more devoted to Bible study and Bible teaching and disciple-raising in obedience to him. When we think of Daniel’s resolution, what is important is drawing a clear line to obey God’s command with uncompromising spirit, whether big or small. Truly Daniel’s decision as quasi-14-year young boy was great. It shows that such a beautiful decision is possible for young boys and girls here, too, because of God’s given spirit in them.

The following verses show how much God blessed Daniel’s resolution to obey God’s word very personally. In verses 9 and 10 it says, “Now God had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to Daniel, but the official told 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.” Wow! God worked right away moving the heart of the chief official to show favour and compassion to Daniel. It was truly unusual at that time. Later we will see that those who disobeyed the king’s command was thrown into a fiery furnace and also lion’s den. The chief official could have said, “Daniel, you just a mere boy, defy the king’s order rejecting his such generosity. Who do you think you are? You will be kicked out of this royal academy and severely punished.” No such a response at all. Rather the chief office was so mindful of Daniel and even expressed his fear of losing his job and further his life. Daniel could see that God was already working not only in his heart giving him uncommon courage, but also working in others’ hearts.

Yet, it could be a temptation for Daniel to compromise because of the chief official’s heartfelt reasonable appeal. But Daniel’s resolution could not be shaken. Yet, he was so wise. In verses 11-14, “Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ‘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 he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.” Again, what wisdom and boldness. We know that ten days of eating matter would not apparently change one’s appearance. But surely Daniel believed divine intervention and suggested a winsome yet risky tactic. Surprisingly, it was accepted.

Then in verses 15-16, “At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetable instead.” God is truly working in the ordinary matters in life, not only in a great way, dividing the Red Sea and making the sun stop and breaking out earthquakes. God worked in the bodily cells of the four young men in ten days, which would normally take several months. God is living and he is a responsive God and the God of practicability. He practically and feasibly works in our day-to-day life, according to one’s faith.

Verse 17 says, “To these young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.” Wow! These blessings were not what they expected and asked for. Babylon was the center of knowledge:  Advanced science, libraries of great, great scope.  Great scholars lived there.  In fact, they were leading the world in those things.  God gave them knowledge of that.  God gave them knowledge truly of the application of the divine Word of God to the situation.  God gave them wisdom. God knew what they needed in their lives as God’s people and to reveal his glory. Especially, Daniel could read visions and dreams. Visions are when you’re awake and dreams are when you’re asleep, and both were a means of revelation from God.

Then in verses 18-20, “At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, 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 his whole kingdom.” These young men have been groomed for three years and after that Nebuchadnezzar conversed with them.  This is the oral exam, the final test to see how well they had done. God’s blessing was immeasurable. In this blessing of God Daniel’s life would be very influential for the next more than 70 years beyond Babylonian kingdom to the kingdom of Mede-Persia. Verse 21 says, “And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.”

May we consider our relationship with God most precious and be able to draw a line in obedience to God’s word with unpromising spirit in this compromising world so that our lives may reveal his living and his glory in his immeasurable blessing.