

DANIEL - CAPTIVE YET CONQUEROR

Study 1

Determination



Read Daniel chapter 1

Daniel was a Jewish captive in Babylon. Behind this statement lies a very sad story. The chapter begins with a very brief outline of the facts. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies were sweeping through Palestine at this time. They rose to power quickly, and during their campaigns besieged Jerusalem. When it fell they took King Jehoiakim captive and also carried away to Babylon, the most influential and intelligent of the people - the 'cream' of Jewish society. Why was this allowed to happen? There is just one answer. The sinful ways of the people of Judah had brought God's judgment, and captivity took place. Daniel was among those carried away in the first conquest. Some years afterwards, in 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar again came to Jerusalem and this time slew many thousands of its inhabitants and burnt down the city. God's judgment upon the sinful nation was complete.

Can you imagine how Daniel and his friends felt as they entered upon their new life in Babylon? It is estimated that Daniel was about 14 years old when this happened. All that he loved, in terms of the worship and the service of his God, was taken away. He would eventually hear of the terrible fate of the beloved City of Jerusalem. But for the present he is in a heathen king's court, surrounded by the evidences and atmosphere of pagan worship. The gods of Babylon were hateful to those who worshiped the ONE TRUE GOD of Israel - the only God. Spend a little time in trying to imagine the contrast between that which you know of Israel's God, as shown in the Old Testament, and the ideas of idolatry and superstition. This will help you to understand a little of Daniel's position in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel's faith in his God was soon TESTED.

It was tested in a seemingly simple manner. The captives had to look their best when they came in before the king. It was therefore planned that they should be fed with food from the king's table. All kinds of delicacies would be theirs. But the Babylonians did not observe Jewish rules on clean and unclean food, see **Leviticus 11**, nor did they drain away the blood when they slaughtered the animals. (**Leviticus 17: 10**) It is possible too, that the king's meat would first have been offered to the idol gods of Babylon, who would have been thanked for it. So that even in such an everyday matter as this, the law and supremacy of God was challenged, and right away Daniel's faith was tested. Would he be LOYAL to the God he loved and served? Or would he compromise, LOSE his testimony and, in effect, worship Babylon's gods? Remember that it is often in the seemingly small things of life that our loyalty to the Lord is tested. The story of Daniel might have been altogether different if he had failed to take his stand right at the beginning.

Daniel gave clear evidence that he TRUSTED God without fear or doubt.

When the test came, this is what we read about him. ***"But Daniel PURPOSED IN HIS HEART that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies". (verse 8)*** Here was a determination to do right at all costs. Young as they were, Daniel and his friends were determined not to compromise their religion, or break God's laws. Daniel had to make up his mind whether his surroundings should alter his allegiance to God. Was he to be a man of God in Jerusalem only, where everything was favourable? It certainly was going to be more difficult in Babylon. Such conditions brought out resolute dependence upon God. Notice the confidence in **verses 11-13**, Daniel had no doubt that he could depend wholly upon the Lord, who would not let them down. So the only course left open to them was to restrict themselves to a vegetarian diet - pulse - and they thrived on it! Remember that trust such as this is only possible if you know the God that you trust. This is as absolutely true for you and me as it was for Daniel. We shall learn from the study of this Book that Daniel knew HIS GOD. Do you?

We see now the TRIUMPH of Daniel's trust.

They graduated from the king's school with honour! This is a wonderful beginning to the book, and this chapter emphasises what GOD DID. **Verse 9** says that He made Daniel to find favour and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. Then **verse 17** develops the story further. God gave them knowledge and understanding, and skill in all learning and wisdom. When they stood before the king they looked better than any of the others! Faith had triumphed - it always does! Read this chapter carefully for it sets the tone of the whole book. We can learn that though captives in an alien land, these men still knew that their God was with them. How important this is! These Hebrew captives were in the place of God's choice. And although, no doubt, they would have gladly gone back home, yet they faithfully served God's purposes as they witnessed powerfully for Him.

To be a Christian does not only mean a DECISION for Christ. It also means a DETERMINATION to honour Him at all costs. God still says to us - ***"those who honour Me, I will honour!" (1 Samuel 2: 30)*** The final verse of our chapter shows what Daniel's determination meant. HE CONTINUED. He lived a long life in witness for his God. So YOU must go on trusting the Lord. Difficulties need never destroy faith, for remember it is not so much the power of our faith, but the power of the God in whom that faith is placed.

Study 2

Demands



Daniel chapter 3

Our lesson does not directly involve Daniel. It concerns the affairs of his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. But you can be sure that Daniel was not far away. We are going to study a test of faith much more intense than that pictured in **chapter 1**. But first it is good to relate this chapter to the previous one, **chapter 2**, where we have the great image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. There, Daniel, on hearing the king's pronouncement of death for all the wise men of Babylon, returns to his house to share the current problem with his three friends. The four of them then resort to prayer (**2: 18**), and the secret of the dream is revealed to Daniel. (**2: 19**) Standing in the presence of the king, Daniel disclaims any personal wisdom. **"BUT"**, he says, **"there is a God in Heaven who reveals secrets"**. (**2: 26-28**)

If later you study Bible prophecy, you will soon find out how important was the vision that was given to Nebuchadnezzar. The image represented Gentile world powers, and Daniel revealed to the king that Babylon was the head of gold. During the centuries, different powers would successfully dominate the scene and then disappear. Make sure when you read this chapter that you do not overlook **"the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands"**. (**2: 45**) To students of prophecy this is the Lord Jesus Christ who will eventually destroy all evil powers that hold sway, and then set up His kingdom which will never pass away.

The image built by Nebuchadnezzar in our chapter is different from the one of **chapter 2**. It could well be that the king was inspired by his dream to build it. It was all of gold and set up in the plain of Dura, where thousands could gather to worship it. As the music sounded, all heads must bow in worship, not only of the image, but also of the proud, despotic king who had built it. Refusal to bow meant ending one's days in the burning fiery furnace. The king of Babylon had usurped the rights of God!

Notice the king's COMMAND.

It admitted no discussion or argument. It was 'either' - 'or'. As the godly Hebrews faced this, it raised the question as to where final authority lay. It was but a simple matter to stand with the crowds and bow their heads, and humanly speaking, this was the safest and easiest course to follow. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego however, were obviously not so much interested in what was easiest, but in what was right. As God's chosen people, Nebuchadnezzar was not in a position to command their worship. They knew the first commandment **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart."** (**Deuteronomy 6: 5**) To these young Hebrews there was a higher authority than that of men - the authority of the living God. There were times for them, and there are times for us, when we should obey God rather than men.

Thus the scene is set for the CONFLICT.

It is obvious from this narrative that a clash of wills took place. The will of a despotic king who was increasing in personal pride and love for domination, and whose aim was to control the wills of his subjects. But there were at least three wills that refused to submit. When others bowed, they stood erect. Notice the blind fury of the king. (**verse 19**) Yet the conflict was much more than could be seen. Behind the scenes it was a battle between the forces of God and good,

and the forces of Satan and evil. To these three Hebrews the issues were as clear as crystal. They must not, could not, bow down to the golden image.

At the heart of this incident lies the unwavering CONFIDENCE of the three men.

Nebuchadnezzar throws down the gauntlet as he seeks to impress them with his power and the folly of their actions. **"Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"** (**3: 15**) The king was sure that he had the answer to the rebels in his hand. But he was wrong, and at no time did the Hebrews move on to the defensive. For them there were two certainties. If it be so, God was ABLE to deliver them. That was the ground of their confidence - the power of their God - greater than the power of the king. But even if God did not choose to deliver them, what then? Notice the words of these men, **"We do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the golden image which you have set up."** (**verse 18**) In other words, there was always the POSSIBILITY of giving way to the king's command. We can learn here that once we have settled in our minds that we must be faithful to the Lord at all costs, we can be confident that God will keep us, even though we are asked to go through the fires of testing.

The story ends with a picture of CONQUEST.

Nebuchadnezzar cast them into the hottest possible fire. Notice **verse 23** - **"they fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace"**. There was no magic here; no optical illusion; they were most certainly in the fire, so that when the king saw (not only them walking in the fire, but also the presence of a fourth Man with them), he was completely shattered. God had taken up and answered his challenge and it was victory for God's cause.

This is a great story! We can call it FAITHFULNESS IN THE FIRE! God does not promise to always deliver His people from suffering. Often the severest trials are endured because of faithfulness. But God does promise that He will always be with them IN THE FIRE. Here is the main point of the story. Those who were COMMITTED became CONQUERORS.

In your own private study you might like to read what the Apostle Peter says in his first Epistle about 'suffering as a Christian'.

Study 3

Dangers



Daniel chapters 4 & 5

To be a captive in Babylon was not too difficult and certainly had its enjoyable side. It is recorded by historians and it was the policy of Babylon to seek to integrate exiles from other nations into its system, thus obtaining the best qualities from other cultures for its own. Daniel and his companions were intelligent and influential men. It is obvious that Daniel in particular had outstanding abilities, and he not only attained a high position, but held on to it for many years. He was highly respected in the pagan court.

There were, nevertheless, DANGERS associated with such a position, for it often meant that Godly counsel would cut right across the ideas of paganism. We have noticed that there could easily have been death for the three faithful men as they were cast into the fire. Human life had very little value in the eyes of despotic monarchs. Theirs was to command, even to the extent of enslaving those they ruled.

In these two chapters we see something of the dangers that were faced.

In Nebuchadnezzar we see the evil of PRIDE. In Belshazzar, is portrayed the sinfulness of PAGAN PURSUITS leading to the denial of God's rights. With the first we find there was repentance and recovery, while in the other case there was judgment and destruction. Right at the heart of these circumstances stands a godly prophet who was involved in the government of the land. Yet Daniel is also intimately associated with the important movements of God. It is interesting to reflect that in every age of human history, God has had His man (or woman) in the right place at the right time.

Let us look first at the incidents of chapter 4.

Through a dream God warns Nebuchadnezzar concerning his arrogance and pride. **Verses 1-3** contain a narrative of the king's reason for recording these events. Notice his admiration of the Most High God. Here is a testimony, from the circles of paganism, to the reality of God's power.

It was a very telling method which God chose to reveal to the king his peril. Perhaps sensing that this dream is against himself, Nebuchadnezzar does not turn to Daniel straight away. (**verses 6-8**) But finally Daniel comes into the king's presence and listens as his experience is unfolded. It is then that Daniel's sense of danger becomes apparent. As we read **verse 19**, it is clear from Daniel's dismay that he does not wish the king ill. But it is also clear that the prophet felt his intentions could easily be misunderstood. For to speak of the downfall of a monarch of Nebuchadnezzar's calibre was, in a natural sense, to court trouble. Wicked men rarely are at ease about their safety. They are usually suspicious about adverse criticism, fearing the worst. But Daniel fearlessly spoke the message of his God. The king was heading for danger, and if he did not repent and turn from his ways he would be brought down.

Look especially at **verse 27**. Not only could Daniel speak the message, but he could also counsel the king to turn from his evil ways and thus avert disaster. DANGER there was - but a faithful DECLARATION gave the answer. But the king's pride in his own achievements (**verse 30**) overrides Daniel's wise advice. Nebuchadnezzar fell and, smitten with a rare mania, believes himself to be an animal, and for seven years tastes God's judgment. You probably find this a strange story, yet Nebuchadnezzar himself authenticates this extraordinary experience. (**verses 1-18; 34-37**) The king's reason left him and every ordinary human faculty seemed lost. Yet God is at work in the depths of his now humble mind, and as he worships the one true God, his reason returns. (**verses 34-37**) Thus the Lord used Daniel in a dangerous situation to challenge the pride of a pagan monarch.

The experience of Nebuchadnezzar supports a principle found throughout Scripture - see the following references - **Proverbs 16: 18; 29: 23; Isaiah 2: 11; Micah 6: 8; Matthew 23: 12; James 4: 6, 10; 1 Peter 5: 6. See also Philippians 2: 5-11.**

Now we look at chapter 5.

Belshazzar followed Nebuchadnezzar on the throne of Babylon. It is 23 years after Nebuchadnezzar's death. Belshazzar is a dissolute, criminal ruler, who at the height of his power makes a great feast for a thousand of his lords. This great feast reaches its peak of entertainment and enjoyment, and the king sends for the holy vessels of the Lord which had been taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, so that wine could be drunk from them. But this apparently simple act brings a

crisis to the festivities, and the fingers of a man's hand appear and write upon the wall! Notice the terror of the king. (**verse 6**) Again the superstition of the monarch is aroused, astrologers and soothsayers are brought in, but to no avail. It is at this point that Daniel is summoned and is faced with the problem.

It is good to notice again here that the prophet is a man in touch with his God. Many years had passed since first he came to Babylon, but his faith is as fresh as ever and he is ready to give a positive answer to the king's request. Just three words are written, and they are weights or units of money. Daniel goes to the root meaning of these words, '**Number**', '**Weigh**', '**Divide**'. (**verses 26-28**) Once again his pronouncement left him open to a king's anger, as it was literally a message of doom. Notice **verses 22-24**; they are a solemn condemnation of the king's way of life. The message is delivered, "**You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting**". (**verse 27**) It is noticeable that there was no time given for repentance. "**THAT VERY NIGHT Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans was slain**". (**verse 30**) So ended the Babylonian supremacy. The Medes and Persians began their domination of the nations.

Look carefully at these two chapters. They show us that though God allows ungodly powers to rule, He is still the Most High God. He still rules in the kingdoms of men. He allows them to go so far in their wickedness and no further. Let them exceed these limits, and judgment falls. Men like Daniel played a vital role in witnessing to the reality of God's purpose. It meant DANGER - but they DARED to be faithful. 'DARE TO BE A DANIEL!'

Study 4

Deliverance



Daniel chapter 6

It was remarkable that Daniel continued to hold a position of importance in the new government of Persia. Notice that in the government of Darius he was one of three presidents. It is interesting to notice too, the contrast between the rule of Babylon and that of the Medes & Persians. The kings of Babylon held absolute rule - their word was final in every matter. This is proved by the events of **chapter 2**. But the kings of Persia ruled through their government, something like the British parliament. We shall observe how the 'parliament' of Darius was able to make him act against his will. This would never have happened with Nebuchadnezzar, and shows the difference between 'absolute' and 'delegated' authority. But Daniel was there, as faithful to his God and as influential as ever.

Think of the influence a godly person can have upon the society in which he lives. For Daniel it was in the high circle of government. At this high level he was able to touch the greatest and yet most godless in the land. Great pressures were brought to bear on him. His life was under continual scrutiny and he frequently faced danger, even death. But he "**purposed in his heart**". (**Daniel 1: 8**) Thus his character was moulded, as more and more he won the respect and favour of the rulers of his day. Daniel was GOD'S MAN! Think of the influence you can have for God in your surroundings. God has put you wherever you are, just as he placed Daniel in the king's palace. If you serve God with the FAITHFULNESS that Daniel did, your life can be as useful as his.

Each test of Daniel's faith was different. When he was offered food from the table of Nebuchadnezzar his PURPOSE was

TESTED and he remained loyal to his God. When the king needed the understanding of his dream in **chapter 2**, it was Daniel's PERCEPTION that was called for, and he relied on the Lord his God for WISDOM. So in each case, at every step of the way, his stand for God was challenged. It is good to read a record of such unswerving loyalty. Best of all, it is good to trace the way in which God was with him and never let him down.

The last picture we have of Daniel in our studies is tremendous. Look at **verses 3-5**. Here is a man who is spoken of as 'distinguished above' others, as a man in whom there was an excellent spirit. The king appreciated his worth and marked him out for promotion. Daniel's colleagues, envying his excellence, sought to DESTROY him. They were evil men, seeking to realise their own selfish ends. A godly man stood in their way, so he must be removed! Yet a tremendous testimony comes out of them. They realised that the only way they could overthrow him was to challenge his loyalty to the law of his God. What a testimony! I wonder if people look at your life and come to the same conclusion? Daniel lived a blameless life, in honesty, industry and purity. We need to be the same if we are to make any impact on the people around us.

Look at the king's DECREE.

This mighty monarch gave commandment for something he later regretted. The nature of the decree was simple. For thirty days the king stood as 'the god' of the people. EVERY PETITION must go to him; every other god or man was outside the decree. Dependence on the king as the fountain-head of life was essential. It is evident that the king asked no questions as he signed the decree, and probably thought little about the consequences of such an action. (**verse 9**) The word of Darius was absolute - even he could not go back on it. The law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed.

Notice now Daniel's DEPENDENCE upon God.

It was out of no disrespect for Darius that Daniel acted as he did. The king has his place in the prophet's way of life and he was a loyal, law-abiding citizen. But God must come first. Daniel could have stopped praying for a month, or he could have prayed in secret. But he was no more ready to compromise as an old man, than he had been as a youth. Thus Daniel does not alter the pattern of his life. Three times a day, as before, he kneels to pray with his windows open towards Jerusalem. He cannot depend upon a pagan king for the spiritual power he needs. His enemies of course would never understand this.

This contains a vital lesson for us. Christians who serve God faithfully know where the secret of their strength lies. If you read through Paul's letters in the New Testament you will learn how much prayer must mean in living for Christ. I wonder if you pray three times a day! It was a good habit with Daniel, and it could be for you!

Finally, we consider the DELIVERANCE of the prophet. Delighted counsellors think they have him! A despondent king is angry with himself and frantically looks for a way out for Daniel. And a man of God is in the lions' den! But **"Our God is able!"** What a story! Daniel's courage shines out in a magnificent way. The king's hands are tied by his own decree, but God's hands are not! Humanly speaking, Daniel was just another meal for the lions. But God was with His servant, and Daniel was as safe from harm in the lions' pit, as his friends had been in the furnace! Notice Daniel's triumphant claim as the king stands fearfully by the lions' den. **"My God sent His**

angel and shut the lions' mouths." (**6: 22**) God was truly ABLE to deliver. There had been no need for Daniel to justify his actions before the king. God had vindicated him! Then were Darius' lamentations changed to inexpressible relief and joy. And even the Daniel-deprived lions did exceedingly well out of the situation! (**verse 24**)

Our studies end with a nation-wide testimony of a pagan monarch to the reality and power of the LIVING GOD. (**verses 25-27**) Think as we conclude our studies, that if Daniel had failed to be faithful to God, we would never have had this testimony in our Bibles. It is a serious thought and should challenge us to be loyal to the Saviour.

Questions

Study 1 DETERMINATION

1. What kind of people were first carried away captive by Nebuchadnezzar?
2. Why was the food from the Royal House unacceptable to Daniel and his three friends?
3. Why was Daniel so ready to trust God?
4. Why is it that faith in God always triumphs?
5. What have you learnt from this lesson about what it means to be a Christian?

Study 2 DEMANDS

1. What lesson can we learn from the course of action that Daniel took in **chapter 2** when faced with the problem of Nebuchadnezzar's dream?
2. What did the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw, represent, and of whom is the 'Stone' which smashed the image, a picture?
3. What two certainties existed in the minds of the three Hebrew men when faced with the fiery furnace?
4. What is said of the fourth person who was seen walking with them? Who was this?
5. What have you learnt from this lesson about 'suffering as a Christian'?

Study 3 DANGERS

1. What does history record that Babylon's policy was regarding its captives?
2. What two evils do we see in the kings of these two chapters?
3. What principle found in Scripture is further supported by Nebuchadnezzar's experience?
4. What was the difference between the end of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar's experience of God's dealings with them?
5. What is the main lesson you have learnt from the study of these two chapters?

Study 4 DELIVERANCE

1. Describe the difference between the government of Babylon and the government of Darius and the Medes and Persians.
2. From looking at Daniel's influence as a man of God, suggest two effects a Christian's influence should have.
3. Why were the men in the government of Darius so hostile to Daniel? How did they seek to 'get him'?
4. What effect did Daniel's deliverance from the lions have upon Darius?
5. In what way has our studies in Daniel been a challenge to your own Christian life?