

Edwin N. Cross

# The prophet Daniel

*a man greatly beloved*

A lecture on Daniel 1

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## Daniel and his friends

The first chapter of Daniel is a very significant preface to an important prophetic book. If Daniel's personal history had run in the same course as the majority of the young prisoners and he had merged in with the life in Babylon, we would probably never have heard of him nor would anyone have had the name Daniel – I think all Daniels are named after this man – nor would God have disclosed the forecast of Gentile history to him. He was born around 625 BC, and was a contemporary of Gautema Buddha who probably visited Persia at the same time that Daniel and his friends were there; but he never came to the knowledge of the true God. To the one is revealed the truth of God's supremacy over events and man's rebellion, the other turned to darkness and founded a system of profoundly deep spiritism, which holds millions in its foul grip to this day.

The word of God had been fulfilled (2 Chron. 38), and the discipline of God upon a rebellious nation was executed. The Babylonians had come into Jerusalem to conquer and to enrich their treasuries. This they did in 606 BC. It was a turbulent year for many. They were the rod of God's wrath against Judah (Isa. 13:5). The long succession of kings of Judah had fully tested God's patience towards them, and now only severe discipline would deal with their idolatry and rebelliousness. The vessels of the temple were carried away into captivity; how touching to consider that those

things which had been dedicated to the service of God were now in the grasp of the heathen and being held for the sinister religion of the Babylonians.

A selection was made of the noble captives and these were probably destined to rule as puppet governors over their fellow Jews. It is not an unknown method in the history of tyrants. It should be noted, however, that God had made a prior selection. Daniel was known to God from before his birth, and chosen for service before the events which now unfold. His birth into the aristocratic family, as well as his pathway, was all mapped out in the mind of God. Known to God, yet these times were to be very turbulent for the youth. He experienced the siege and plunder of Jerusalem, the intrusion into and destruction of God's temple and separation from home and family. These events would bring deepest exercise. Daniel was sent to the Babylonian university to read the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The teens and early twenties are years fraught with a special danger. These youths had been taken captive and were far from home and parental control and influences. The educational system of Babel was not designed to train young men to be spiritual godly men. It had an altogether different agenda; its purpose was to train men for its own aggrandisement and empire, to make them good Babylonians. Young people need to be aware of this today. The educational system of this world does not now exist to make them good Christians.

The king is a picture of the sovereign of this world: Satan. He orders not only the education in his domain, but also the nourishment for those in it. He is its provider. If we wish to take our place in the world's great system we will find much that suits our natural appetites. Every taste and inclination is catered for: education, entertainment, society, employment, everything including religion. The whole world lies in the arms of Satan. We need to be aware of this and see it as an entire system at variance to the mind of God and contrary to His Christ.

The finer names of Daniel's companions are often forgotten in preference to the Babylonian names with which they were renamed. The meanings, as far as we can ascertain from such authorities as we could refer to, are *Daniel*: God is my Judge; *Hannaiah*: Jah is Gracious (compare this with John); *Mishael*: Who is like unto God? (akin to Michael); *Azariah*: Jah is my Helper (similar to Eliezer or Lazarus). It is good to try to remember these Hebrew names and their meanings. Although the scriptural use of their heathen names is intended to serve as a reminder to the Jewish reader that the times of the Gentiles had set in as a discipline.

Daniel is chiefly referred to by his original name to convey the idea that the people of God were under judgment. Being renamed was a studied insult to their religious faith as well as a blasphemy against the true God. By giving new names the

Babylonians expressed their ownership of these slaves. These new names do not give God the glory. Compare the new names and consider their dreadful meanings: Daniel becomes *Beltshazzar* – Bel (Marduk) protects his life; Hannaiah – *Shdrach*, Command of Aku (Moon god of Babylonia); Mishael – *Meshach*, Who is like Aku? And Azariah – *Abed-Nego*, Servant of Nego or Nabu (a secondary deity, perhaps indicating 'son of Nebu').

This was a very difficult time for these teenagers, taken forcibly away from home, a march hundreds of miles to the north to the alien land of idolaters. They were taken away from their religious centre, from parental control. This and likely much more of unrecorded horror – all in the impressionable teenage years. The environment, the education, the language and the names may be changed, but once God has done His work in the heart there is a new life which can now answer to God's command.

## The king's food and drink

We now come to the major crisis in Daniel's life. It occurred early on in his career. Many of his fellows may possibly have accepted the new situation and adapted, but Daniel was determined to obey God's word. "Well, that's all right back home, but here no one will know about it. You can do what you please! You should think of yourself, your future". Such pressure and plausible arguments are set before the young today. Can we not think that similar enticements were held before Daniel? The reason for his faithfulness was that he had God's word in his heart. That alone is the source of true strength in the young Christian (1 John 2:14). What the Bible said was all that mattered to this captive. Its supreme authority held sway over his life. He was away from home, godly parents, the temple, bereft of virtually every human support. He resolved to do God's will and so proceeded to take an extraordinary course, simply and solely because it was found in the Bible. Again he would have faced a personal conflict. The appeals to common sense would have been set before him: "Don't be silly in public; what you believe in private is all right, but don't make a show of it. When in Rome... adapt yourself to your new circumstances, times are different now. In any case you have no option!"

But a man with an open Bible has an option every time. Acts 5:29 is clear: "We ought to obey God rather than men". In the face of all that the adversary might say against such a course, Daniel came to the right decision in his heart. Daniel might have to stand alone, but *stand* he would. Has such a decision been made by you? "He would not defile himself". Are there young men and women today who govern

their conduct by such a purpose? This is really the true and essential feature of the Nazirite of Numbers 6: separation from what the world has to offer. Who would eschew the dainties and rich fare set before them in such circumstances? But as one concerned, not with his stomach, but with God's will and pleasure, Daniel determines to refuse the king's food.

Daniel had Leviticus 7:22-27 and 11 before him. These passages are most interesting to study in the light of New Testament teaching regarding what we should consume and how we should walk. The king is an apt figure for the one who wants to feed your mind with the fare of this world. The food of this world is what the natural man enjoys and gains all his nourishment from, and he draws all his sustenance and strength from what Satan offers. But that portion is destructive of the spiritual life. Today the portion the god of this world sets before us may be found in the printed or electronic media, the internet, cinema, theatre, opera, television, etc, and Satan wants to feed your mind with trash and filth. The Christian is to conduct his life as if he were a Nazirite, and must walk a path of separation to God.

The verses 9-14 of Daniel 1 also suggest important aspects in the Christian's life. As in the case of Joseph centuries before (Gen. 39:4, 21), Daniel's enemies show him some pity and consideration. This brings out in a very real way the fact that "when a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7). Their eunuch was unwilling to be a martyr by proxy, but when faith is operative a way forward amidst the obstacles will be sought, and grace will secure a way forward. The steward is approached and agrees to the test. It was an impossible request, but where there is a will there is a way. Daniel trusted his God to vindicate him, and here we see a just man who lived by faith.

In the bright days of the Kingdom under Solomon, you could, perhaps at least outwardly, comply with many of the requirements of the law. In brighter and better days of the past when there was more piety and adherence to the Word of God, yes, then it was easier! But now all is in ruins, and it is not so easy to take such a path. Generally when circumstances are so opposed and hostile to us, we are apt to get depressed and then we might be tempted to give up as hopeless all attempts at being faithful. We might be tempted to jettison any attempt to maintain what is due to the Lord and what is consistent with His word. But that cowardly path was not to be taken by Daniel. Faith can, and must, be exercised and the pathway of obedience taken.

Daniel was consistent in what constituted practical separation from the world. We too, ought to be marked by a decided refusal to receive anything from this world.

When we are in that state, it puts us in a condition to receive from God. Daniel passed the test of the ten days and God enabled him and his friends to succeed. The truth of the scripture "For those who honor Me, I will honor" (1 Sam 2:30), received another triumphant illustration. Daniel's piety was great gain, in fact he was ten times better. Of course there was responsibility and dedicated hard work in his studies, but in all he looked to his God to sustain him in the circumstances.

The faithful conduct of the four youths meets with God's approval and they are found superior to all that were nourished in the dark sciences of this world. From Daniel especially we would draw an important lesson. Essentially the book of Daniel is a prophetic book. Do you want to appreciate the secret of the prophetic word, do you want to understand God's thoughts and purposes? It is simple: read His word and act upon what you find there, walk with God and not with the world, and then your eyes will be enlightened. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25:14). But not only did their obedience bring reward, it prepared them for coming days. In trials and exercise they would learn the character of their God. "The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits" (Dan. 11:32), and so it was.

Daniel continued unto the first year of Cyrus. Scripture actually records the fact that he exceeded that. He started well in his youth and continued in long service to God in life-long servitude under heathen monarchs. The good start was very commendable, but continuance and a good conclusion are also expected of us. May God also grant us grace in order to serve Him acceptably. Paul gave Timothy this word and it well suits our study here: "But continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

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