

2. From Jerusalem to Babylon (1Q 2020—Daniel)

Biblical Material: 2 Kings 21:10–16; Daniel 1; Gal. 2:19, 20; Matt. 16:24–26, 2 Cor. 4:17; James 1:5.

Quotes

- You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. *C.S. Lewis*
- On matters of style, swim with the current, on matters of principle, stand like a rock. *Thomas Jefferson*
- Always vote for principle, though you may vote alone. *John Quincy Adams*
- Do God the honor to trust Him when it comes to matters of loss for the sake of principle. *Charles Spurgeon*
- Nothing will bind the eyes of man quicker than the touch of compromise. A principle not compromised is a principle worth dying for. A dream not compromised is a dream worth living for. *Ogwo David Emenike*
- We should be able to refuse enchanting proposals and opportunities, if they contradict God's principles. *Sunday Adelaja*

Questions

Eating—is that the real question? Is this just about diet, or is it about reason, about cause and effect, and about principles that have good reasons? What does this story tell us about God and his purposes, even in difficult situations? It would have been easy to give up on God if you saw this experience as God failing in his promises—why didn't Daniel and friends do so?

Bible summary

2 Kings 21:10–16 is the rebuke given to King Manasseh for his idolatry. Daniel 1 sets the scene, explains how Daniel and his friends have been taken captive to Babylon, and details their commitment to their principles, including their diet. Paul says he is crucified for Christ (Gal. 2:19, 20). Jesus tells his disciples that in order to follow him they have to deny themselves and take up their crosses (Matt. 16:24–26). “These trivial troubles we have only last for a little while, but they produce for us an ever-increasing degree of glory.” 2 Cor. 4:17 FBV. God is the one who gives us wisdom (James 1:5).

Comment

The Book of Daniel begins with the stark comment that reveals God abandoning his people and allowing them to be taken into captivity. Imagine what this would have meant to an Israelite who “trusted in the promises.” How would this affect you if you had been living at that time? Is it fair that faithful believers suffer with the unfaithful? And what does this whole story do to God's reputation? Surely Daniel and his friends must have been tempted to give up on this God who had allowed them to fall into enemy hands, who had not protected and preserved them.

In terms of the great controversy, what conclusions can we draw from this illustration from history? A deterministic approach would say that the experience of Israel was fated to be that way—even that this was predestined by God. But from the perspective of the issues in the great controversy, the capture and exile of Israel points to choice, freedom, a beneficent God who allows his created beings to decide on their future, and for sin to play out...

When it comes to the test faced by Daniel and his friends, we could reasonably ask, “What was the real problem? Couldn’t they have gone along with the king and the diet they were offered. It was not as if they were being asked to totally deny their faith.

We can easily rationalize our decisions. Daniel could have told himself that becoming friends with the king was more important than his diet. He could have believed that God had placed him in this situation, so God clearly didn’t mind what he did. See how we can think along such lines!

What is the difference between compromise and cooperation? How do we decide what is principle, and what is not? Plus the innocent suffer with the guilty—it wasn’t Daniel’s fault he was carried off to Babylon, and he could have excused himself in many ways. Here we have an important lesson to learn about sin and its consequences as the great controversy unfolds.

This introduction to Daniel and his friends is significant in that it reveals their fundamental characters. We see from the beginning that they are dedicated to God, and all that means in terms of doing what is good and right. They are not prepared to sacrifice their convictions, and are willing to pay the price if necessary.

This test was not over being a vegetarian, but of accepting the right of the king to rule their lives. As we shall see later, they all were good servants of the king, but refused to compromise their faith.

(As an aside: Why are they not called Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in the account? Why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Interesting that the pagan names are used for Daniel’s three friends, rather than their original Hebrew names, and we tend to follow that. Maybe we should go back to what they were first called. Even Daniel was given a pagan name, Belteshazzar, but we don’t use that).

Ellen White comments

Daniel and his three companions had a special work to do. Although greatly honored in this work, they did not become in any way exalted. They were scholars, being skilled in secular as well as religious knowledge; but they had studied science without being corrupted. They were well-balanced because they had yielded themselves to the control of the Holy Spirit. These youth gave to God all the glory of their secular, scientific, and religious endowments. Their learning did not come by chance; they obtained knowledge by the faithful use of their powers; and God gave them skill and understanding. True science and Bible religion are in perfect harmony. {4BC 1167}

When the four Hebrew youth were receiving an education for the king’s court in Babylon, they did not feel that the blessing of the Lord was a substitute for the taxing effort required of them. They were diligent in study; for they discerned that through the grace of God their destiny depended upon their own will and action. They were to bring all their ability to the work; and by close, severe taxation of their powers, they were to make the most of their opportunities for study and labor. {4BC 1167}

There is need of a much closer study of the Word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work. We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the Papacy, but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. {Ev 577.1}