

Daniel and his friends



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Daniel 1:3-19

God had warned the Jews over and over again that they would fall into the hands of their enemies if they didn't change their ways and turn back to God. Since the Jews did not listen, finally God allowed them to be taken into captivity by the king of Babylon.

One day the king [Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon] ordered Ashpenaz, his highest palace official, to choose some young men from the royal family of Judah and from other leading Jewish families. The king said, "They must be healthy, handsome, clever, wise, educated, and fit to serve in the royal palace. Teach them how to speak and write our language and give them the same food and wine that I am served. Train them for three years, and then they can become court officials."

Four of the young Jews chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all from the tribe of Judah. But the king's chief official gave them Babylonian names: Daniel became Beltshazzar, Hananiah became Shadrach, Mishael became Meshach, and Azariah became Abednego. Daniel made up his mind to eat and drink only what God had approved for his people to eat. And he asked the king's chief official for permission not to eat the food and wine served in the royal palace. God had made the official friendly and kind to Daniel. But the man still told him, "The king has decided what you must eat and drink. And I am afraid he will kill me, if you eat something else and end up looking worse than the other young men."

The king's official had put a guard in charge of Daniel and his three friends. So Daniel said to the guard, "For the next ten days, let us have only vegetables and water at mealtimes. When the ten days are up, compare how we look with the other young men, and decide what to do with us." The guard agreed to do what Daniel had asked. Ten days later, Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better than the young men who had been served food from the royal palace. After this, the guard let them eat vegetables instead of the rich food and wine. God made the four young men clever and wise. They read a lot of books and became well educated. Daniel could also tell the meaning of dreams and visions.

At the end of the three year period set by King Nebuchadnezzar, his chief palace official brought all the young men to him. The king interviewed them and discovered that none of the others were as outstanding as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they were given positions in the royal court.

Commentary

God had warned his people that Israel and Judah would be overrun by foreign powers if they continued to turn their backs on God's laws and God's love. They had not listened, and Jerusalem had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar, who took the king and other leaders away to live under guard in Babylon. The temple had been stripped of its gold and precious ornaments.

It seemed to everyone that God had abandoned his people, but the story of Daniel and his three friends became a sign that God was still at work. The Babylonian king treated them more kindly than they had expected, and their guard was friendly too. God made sure that their vegetarian diet left them stronger than those fed on the king's rich food. God also blessed them in their language learning and their studies, so that after three years they were appointed as the king's most trusted court officials, even though they were captured foreigners. God was still with his people, just as he had promised he always would be, turning a disaster into an opportunity.

Questions

- ▶ How would the people left behind in Jerusalem have felt at this time?
- ▶ How was it that Daniel and his friends managed to go on believing in God even though everything looked hopeless?
- ▶ What signs do you see in the story that God was still looking after His people?
- ▶ What can help us go on trusting in God when everything seems to have gone wrong?



Visual aid

Put together a bowl of washed raw vegetables, such as carrot sticks, corn, peppers and peas. Imagine living just on this food for three years!



Activity idea

Daniel and his friends were given new names and had to learn a new language. Using the internet, find out what your names mean and have them translated into another language. Then choose another language, perhaps one from the Middle East where Babylon was, and learn a phrase such as “I want to eat vegetables!” The four friends would also have had to dress as Babylonians. Find out what the traditional clothes looked like in those days and try to dress up in the same way, with clothes you can find around the home. (According to Daniel 3, this would have included wearing a turban.)



Prayer idea

Use Scrabble letters to spell the words disaster, loss, failure and tears. Now break up the letters and look for new words of hope that God can bring out of this mess—trust, rest, courage, and so on. As you do this, pray that God will help your family and others you know to find God’s love and help when all seems to be lost.

Key verse

God had made the official friendly and kind to Daniel (Daniel 1:9).

New Testament story link

Philippians 1:12-14: Although Paul was in prison, he could see that God was at work, helping him and others to believe.



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