

I DARE YOU TO BE A REAL BELIEVER LIKE DANIEL

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by Dr. Henderson Ward



Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known

Those of us who are familiar with the Bible's Old Testament would know that it is filled with many examples of great men and women worthy of our respect, admiration and study. There were people of outstanding ability, faith, integrity and commitment to God and who have left behind a legacy for all time. For example we have men such as:

1. Abraham, living in an idolatrous household (his father Terah made idols for a living) but with his desire to obey God he launched out in faith and did not hold back even if it meant sacrificing his son.
2. Joseph, a man of integrity and strong moral principles who stood firm when pestered by Potiphar's wife even though he knew to deny her could cost him his liberty or even his life.
3. Caleb, a great man of indomitable courage and outstanding faith that conquered the vast giant-infested mountains now known as Hebron when he had reached the age of eighty years.
4. Ruth, a woman of such courage, commitment and faith who chose to abandon her people for a life of service to the God of Israel to such an extent that she became the maternal progenitor of both King David and Jesus Christ.

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This is just a few of these great stalwarts. In this reflection we will be studying another good example of an outstanding, committed and faithful servant of God in the person of young Daniel. This topic is in the form of a challenge, a contest of courage, a "dare to" for the Lord. As we proceed please bear in mind some things, such as:

The need to pay careful and prayerful attention: "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away" (Hebrews 2:1, NIV)

The need to act on God's word: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22, NIV)

With these thoughts in mind our reflection is based on Daniel 1:1-21

First we are stunned by Daniel's bad break Daniel 1:1-7

Rapacious Babylon invades Israel

History tells us that Babylon was the first great world empire taking over from the Assyrians and dominating the then known world and occupying great swathes of Mesopotamia. It was early in the reign of King Jehoiakim of Israel, around 597BC that things began to happen and under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon lays a successful siege to Jerusalem and our the Bible states, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it." (Daniel 1:1) The siege was very successful and after a prolonged time, believed to be three months, the city surrendered. The king of Judah, King Jehoiakim, was captured and along with consecrated articles from the temple, taken to Babylon (Daniel 1:2a)

This King Jehoiakim was an exceedingly wicked man, 2 Kings 23: 36-37 reads, "Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done." His father Jehoahaz was also a very wicked man and in this case like father like son.

His capture and public humiliation (he was taken to Babylon bound with fetters) was due recompense for his abominations. It is stated in 2 Chronicles 36: 8, "Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah"

Like evil doers everywhere God will call them to account but here the result was that Israel was successfully invaded; it was not the case of one evil man being overthrown. Bad leadership can wreck the life of the guilty as well as the innocent.

Young Daniel and friends taken

Like most conquering armies the Babylonians took all the top people and that included Daniel, along with friends and associates who were captured and taken to Babylon as shown here, "Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" (Daniel 1:6) These were royals and nobles and could have been living in or adjacent to the

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palace and might have been a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. These young men were chosen primarily for their external qualities, their health and good looks but they also had admirable inner qualities, "Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability" (Daniel 1:4a) They were selected for special training, to enable them to serve as courtiers to the king and in an attempt to Babylonize them, and so heap contempt on them and their religion and totally subjugate them, they were given names reflecting Babylonian idolatry:

Daniel's name which meant "God is my judge" was changed to Belteshazzar meaning "Bel in my judge". Hananiah's name which meant "Jehovah is gracious" was changed to Shadrach meaning "Marduke is gracious". Mishael's name which meant "Who is like God" was changed to Meshach meaning "Who is like Marduke". Azariah's name which meant "Jehovah helps" was changed to Abednego meaning "Nebu helps"

A large amount of perverted food was provided

One of the ways conquerors show their domination and disregard for a conquered people is to force them to eat food they would otherwise not touch. This particular case has to do with people that for cultural and religious reasons classify certain foods as dirty, unhealthy and forbidden. This food was probably offered to Babylonian idols as per their tradition and then to offer it to Jews was most contemptible and cruel. The food might have been killed and prepared in contravention of Jewish food laws as described in Leviticus chapter 11. The food could have contained forbidden (unclean) ingredients which Jews were forbidden to eat as recorded thus, "It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood" (Leviticus 3:17)

To understand the severity of this situation just remember the horror Peter experienced when he got a vision from heaven where there were all manner of four-footed beasts and a clear voice commanded, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." (Acts 10:13) and Peter's response, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." (Acts 10:13)

All of these things together constituted a very bad break indeed for the young Daniel and unlike so many who would have drowned in apathy and self pity he showed tremendous character. Remember that Daniel was about fourteen years old at this stage. Would to God that people especially our youth would look again at Daniel and take a leaf out of his book.

Then we are thrilled with Daniel's bold bid Dan 1: 8-16

It would have been easy to play along, do not cause any trouble and see how things pan out because at least you are alive and you are not so bad off. Daniel was different and he decided he would take a stand rather than drift with the rolling tide.

Daniel decides not to compromise

Daniel decides to take a stand but not one based on trepidation and convenience but on long-standing principles learnt from his youth, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would

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not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank." (Daniel 1:8a) Daniel had a lot of confidence in his Jewish cuisine and knew that God had instructed Moses on these matters so he decided to have no truck with the king's food, "therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8b) and instead he decided to ask for and be content with simple, nutritious food.

This is something we all can learn and improve our health in the process. The simple, nutritious, locally grown food is often so much better than other people's exotic offering.

Daniel commits to faith

Daniel was not bent on bravado and confrontation, but with tact and sensitivity for the feelings of the chief official he politely made his request as shown here, "therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs" (Daniel 1:8b) He knew he could rely on God's help for God supports all those who rely on him, "Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink." (Daniel 1:11-12) Daniel was committing to something that obviously had great risks but he ventured forth, assuredly, on faith alone. "Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants." (Daniel 1:13)

This is a timely reminder to us all that the believer's walk is a walk of faith in God or it is a walk of failure. The Bible encourages us to, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Daniel's stand had numerous impacts and influences

When we trust God and refuse to be intimidated by our situation there are always impacts and influences: some expected and others not. The first visible outcome was their pleasing, physical appearance as this scripture shows, "And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat" (Daniel 1:15a). The guard that was jeopardizing his future prospects and even his life was suitably impressed and compliant, "Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse" (Daniel 1:16a). In a cloistered and highly visible environment, others undoubtedly would have observed these developments.

Like Daniel and his friends believers are always under scrutiny even when we are not conscious of it and hence the warning "Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1Peter 5:8)

Finally we are delighted with Daniel's bountiful blessings Dan 1:17-21

We never know what will be the outcome of sufferings borne or risks taken or even if our faith will immediately prevail for such is the nature of our existence. However difficult things are we

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can be assured that God is with us and as long as we put our trust in him all will be well. We are told, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Young Daniel's stance produced enormous blessings all round as we can see.

We observe generous compensation for the principals

It is abundantly true, and the Bible gives testimony to this right through, that immediate blessings do not always flow from standing on our principles. In this instance the blessings flowing from Daniel's principled stance were immediate, wide spread and significant. Daniel received blessings in abundance, "And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king" (Daniel 1:19). So here were Daniel and his friends, foreigners to this country, being elevated to the highest rank of royal advisers and Daniel himself later to become chief adviser; enormous blessings at ant time. Blessings also flowed from Daniel and his friends because they themselves were blessed as our text shows, "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17a).

Just like Abraham and Joshua, choosing the right path is always the wise thing to do and could lead to blessings for ourselves and to those around us. On the contrary bad choices can be disastrous as witnessed by greedy Achan sinning as recorded in Joshua 7: 1-26.

We notice abundant compensation for the associates

There is a verse of scripture that says, "I will bless them that bless thee" (Genesis 12:3) and another one that says, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9:31). The guard and chief officer also received their blessings because they were kind and gracious to Daniel and his friends. You may well ask, "What about the King, what did he receive? Well the king received blessings by receiving high quality, godly information and guidance from the best as this text shows, "in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers" (Daniel 1:20)

This is the measure of the grace of God for the King's entire household profited by the presence and service of Daniel and his friends

We witness yet more eminent compensation for Daniel

As mentioned earlier we never know what will be the outcome of sufferings borne or risks taken or even if our faith will immediately prevail but believers are to do the right thing regardless. Because of his stance Daniel remained a top official in the palace for the entire 70 years of Babylonian rule and we know this from history but even more so because the Bible records it thus, "And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus" (Daniel 1:21).

The blessings bestowed attended Daniel even into the Persian Empire and under the Persian kings Darius and Cyrus. This same Daniel still wielded great influence and prospered greatly

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under these rulers, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Daniel 6: 28).

Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone, dare to have a purpose firm and dare to make it known says a chorus to a song by Philip Paul Bliss. I dare all believers to be like Daniel. Here was a young man of great integrity, courage and enormous politeness who refused to compromise even to the extent of risking his own life. Daniel shows us that we do not have to abandon God in order to prosper as so many believe and practice but by sticking to our faith and our principles God will stand by us and see us through. Our young people need to follow Daniel's example and unreservedly commit their lives to God. Believers everywhere, and especially those in leadership, need to have more tact and less arrogance if they are to be effective for the Lord and above all however we are tested we must keep the faith.

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