

DANIEL'S DECISION OF FAITH

Daniel 1:1-21

Key verse 1:8

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way."

We thank the Lord for richly blessing our study of Hebrews and helping us to receive Jesus as our eternal High Priest and as the beginner and perfecter of faith. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, in the time of suffering, by faith and with patience, we may continue to walk and receive what is promised and God's testimony. In our struggle of faith, we may look up to this Jesus all the time and follow him, sharing in his shame according to his example and bearing the cross of God's mission for the world campus mission patiently. Let us all the time look up to Jesus and write great faith history for spiritual revival in Europe.

In the coming weeks we will have the opportunity to study the book of the prophet Daniel. Who was Daniel? Daniel was a Jewish boy born in a dark period of Jewish history. Daniel became a prisoner of war from Judah in Babylon as a teenager (probably between 14 and 17). But he rose to become the highest official and closest confidant of various world rulers. His service spanned a span of nearly 80 years. Daniel witnessed the decline of Judah, the rise and fall of the Babylonian world empire, and the rise of the Persian world empire. Kings came and went. But Daniel kept his faith and his decision of faith. He made a small but consistent decision of faith in his youth and held to it throughout his life. When he held on to it, he received God's help in severe temptation, along with God's blessing and also the authority to be used as a spiritual shepherd even for kings. His faith and decision of faith shine and radiate "like the

brightness of heaven" to this day, pointing "many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3).

In today's text, we learn that God richly blesses a faith decision to which we faithfully adhere. Daniel chose not to be defiled by the tempting offers of the ungodly environment, but to maintain his spiritual identity and live as a man of God. Like Daniel, let us make a faith decision to stand on the side of God in the midst of the ungodly environment, to be used as Bible teachers and spiritual leaders for His work of salvation.

1. Daniel, a prisoner of war from Judah in Babylon (1-7)

Let's look at verses 1 and 2: "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god." King Jehoiakim was the third last king of Judah. Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for 11 years. During his reign, there was a change in the balance of power in the world: By winning the Battle of Karkemish in about 605 B.C., the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar gained dominance of the eastern Mediterranean from the Egyptians. About a year later, which was about

the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign, Jehoiakim submitted to King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar allowed Jehoiakim to continue to rule as a vassal king. But Nebuchadnezzar took his tribute from the temple treasures, among others; and he also took captives from the royal family and from other noble families of the Jews. Daniel and his three friends were taken out of the middle of their lives at that time. They were of noble birth. But now they were taken to Babylon as prisoners of war. This happened about 18 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem by the rebellion of King Zedekiah.

Let's look at verses 3 through 4: "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians." King Nebuchadnezzar was not only militarily successful, but also a well-schooled and wise king by his father Nabopolassar. He knew that in order to rule his vast, multicultural empire, he needed the help of the members of the subjugated peoples. So he had young and capable people selected from among the captives of the subjugated peoples. These were to undergo an intensive three-year elite education, learning, among other things, the Chaldean script and language. Then they would enter a civil service career with the king.

Let's look at verses 5 through 7: "The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego." The number of young men in captivity is not known; there

may have been hundreds. The number of those chosen is also not known. But among them were these four who were chosen to go through the royal training. Humanly speaking, they might have been proud of it. The best education beckoned to them, followed by a secure and lucrative position with the king. But the price was high. They had to submit themselves completely and leave their previous lives behind. The king even determined what they should eat from now on. Their names were also changed: Daniel ("God is judge") became Belshazzar ("Baal protect the king"). Hananiah ("God is great") became Shadrach ("rule of the moon god"). Mishael ("Who is like God?") became Meshach ("Who is like the moon god?"). Azariah ("God helped") became Abed-Nego ("servant of Nergal"). A person's name is very important because it says something about a person's personality and vision. Daniel and his friends had to give up their meaningful Jewish names and were given new names derived from the Babylonian gods and culture. There was a very strong pressure for Daniel and his 3 friends from the Babylonian occupiers on the one hand. On the other hand, there was a strong temptation to become New Babylonians by abandoning their spiritual origins and their faith in God.

What was the king's goal? The chosen men were to be re-educated and take on the identity as Babylonians and servants of the Babylonian king. This is exactly how things are going in our time. Satan works not only with whips but through various enticements to tempt believers. Our new generation workers and campus students are in a very similar situation. They are spiritually exposed to the same danger. Europe was once the Christian West. But today, spiritually speaking, Europe resembles the Babylon of that time. In schools and universities, the worship of God and the spiritual heritage of Europe are strongly criticized and relativized. In contrast, the teachings of humanism, namely a life without God, the justification of homosexuality and genderism, and a lifestyle in which everyone should live as he or she wishes, are supported. In this environment, it is very

easy for us to lose our spiritual identity as God's people and as shepherds and Bible teachers, and to conform to the worldly lifestyle. Therefore, we are to pause here and consider:

How can we live in this secular environment with a clear identity as children of God and fulfill our mission entrusted by God as shepherds and Bible teachers? - God gives us the answer through the example of Daniel. We can learn from him how to hold on to our spiritual identity and be used by God in a godless environment.

2. Daniel's Decision and God's Blessing (8-21)

Let's look at verse 8: "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." Here we see that at the beginning of his life in Babylon, Daniel made a clear decision before the eyes of the invisible God not to make himself unclean with the pagan culture of the Babylonians, but to live a holy life before God. In Exodus chapter 11, God gave His people a very detailed list of commandments about what they could and could not eat. He then said, "For I am the LORD your God. Therefore you shall sanctify yourselves so that you become holy, for I am holy; and you shall not defile yourselves with any beast that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that I might be your God. Therefore you shall be holy, for I am holy." (Deut. 11:44, 45) Perhaps they did not understand why pork neck steak is unclean while chicken breast fillet is clean. But it is also not about what is clean and what is unclean meat, but about sanctification as God's people through obedience to God's command.

In our lives, there are many decisions we have to make, such as what school to go to, what to study or what to work at. What is decisive for our future course of life is whether or not we make our decisions before God,

our Lord and Creator. Daniel made his decision before God, according to the Word of God. He made his decision not according to his feelings or human reason, but before God. Daniel's decision was a spiritual life decision not to be defiled as the holy people of God by the pagan food of the Babylonian king. His decision seems to be a small insignificant decision on the outside, but it was a courageous decision of faith that he made before God and that greatly pleased and blessed God. Daniel lived before the eyes of his Almighty Creator and Lord and sought to please Him. Nebuchadnezzar's food was unclean for several reasons. From the 3rd book of Moses, chapter 11, Daniel knew various dietary rules of the Jews that God had once given Moses for the Israelites, for example, regarding the eating of meat and of clean and unclean animals. But more seriously, what Nebuchadnezzar had eaten and drunk had previously been sacrificed to idols. This made the matter so serious, since God clearly forbade His people to eat of the sacrifice to idols. (Ex. 34:15)

Let's read verse 8 again. " But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way." This shows his priorities. A right relationship with God, his Lord and Creator, was more important to him than a good education or a promising future. For this, he was even willing to risk his life. He would not compromise on this. He had already experienced in his own body the consequences of his people's and ancestors' disobedience to God when Judah became subject to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel and his people were led into Babylonian captivity.

Our young people have made up their minds and are making efforts not to make themselves unclean with the lifestyle of self-realization or self-centered living and the food of this world, e.g., computer games, social media on the Internet, alcohol, drugs, and youth lust. They chose to develop their relationship with God in their youth through early morning prayer, Bible study, life fellowship and disci-

ple-making, and to live a life with God's mission and for God's glory. For this, they daily fight the spiritual battle of denying themselves and obeying God's word and cooperating in God's work from the heart. Therefore, God has begun to use many of them at a young age as important workers in the work of God. God has also richly blessed the life decision of our 5 baptized children not to live a life like their classmates or fellow students in college during their teenage years, but rather to live before their Almighty Creator and Lord and participate in the suffering of Jesus with joy. In this way, God educates them to be men and women of God who learn to live holy lives as God's people. God is greatly pleased by and blesses such faith and faith choices.

There are numerous examples of great faith decisions in the Bible, such as the decision of Moses. He decided to no longer enjoy the privileges of Pharaoh's palace, but much rather to stand by his Hebrew brothers and sisters in faith and share in their sufferings. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way in chapter 11:24-26: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward." Moses greatly pleased and honored God with this life decision. Therefore, God later used him as a spiritual leader for God's people to lead them out of the Egyptian captivity and teach them God's commandments and instructions so that they would take up the identity as God's people.

H. Peter Schweitzer entered college with dreams of becoming a computer science professor. But through Bible study, he made a decision of faith, according to Genesis 12:2, to leave his homeland and move to a land God wanted to show him. God blessed his decision of faith and raised him to be a responsible spiritual leader for His work of salvation in Germany and Europe and a blessing for the world mission. M. Dr. Peter Chang

also made a faith decision not to follow the path of a worldly career, but to sacrifice his doctorate in pharmacy to God in order to serve the Disciple Making Ministry in Bonn and the German, European and world mission full-time. This was a faith decision before God and a life decision that pleased and blessed God greatly. God used him as an influential spiritual leader and servant of His Word, rightly dispensing the Word of God in an ungodly time.

To an unbelieving person, Daniel's personal decision of faith seems very small and insignificant. But it was the beginning of his independent life of faith in total dependence on God. His decision of faith in his youth was like a mustard seed. It grew bigger and bigger as time went on. God used Daniel as His prophet, His mouthpiece in his generation, interpreting God's word and visions to believers and unbelievers alike. Without people of faith like Daniel, the story of the Israelites' return from Babylonian captivity would probably have been unthinkable.

We learn here how important it is to make a decision of faith and to fight for it spiritually with all our heart and to stick to it. Many Christians in Europe live without a decision of faith, just enjoying the good conditions. They want to live successfully and well and maybe do some good. But without faith or a decision of faith, it is impossible to please God and also impossible to be used by God. A person's decision of faith makes his life truly meaningful before God. May God help each of us to make a clear decision of faith before God, our Creator and Lord, and hold on faithfully by faith. God will be very pleased and will surely bless this.

Now let's look at how God was pleased by Daniel's decision and blessed them. Let's look at verses 9 and 10: "Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." After Daniel made a

decision of faith not to defile himself with the king's food and with his wine, he took some practical steps. He also convinced his three friends, as God's people, not to make themselves unclean and set them up as prayer workers. He was a good shepherd to them and an encouragement to live holy lives before God in the midst of the pagan environment and to hold on to their identity as the people of God in all circumstances. It looked impossible that Daniel would be able to put his decision into action. But Daniel did not give up, but found a way by trusting in God's help. He was a teenager, but he did not feel too young, because he trusted in God. Certainly, he had also prayed to God with all his heart for His help in return. When Daniel decided to stick to his decision, trusting in God's assistance, God gave it that the chief eunuch became favorable and gracious to him. The eunuch was responsible for Daniel and the other students of the royal academy. He had an open heart for Daniel's concerns. Although it was very dangerous for the chamberlain himself, he wanted to support Daniel by setting up a suitable overseer over Daniel and his friends.

Let's look further at verses 11 through 16. God gave Daniel wisdom to enlist the overseer as another associate. Daniel explained his lifestyle pleasing to God to the overseer. In verse 12 he said to the overseer, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink." Daniel's physical instincts would also have liked to take delicious food and drink from the king's court. But he struggled spiritually to deny himself and live according to the Word of God. What was the result after the ten-day trial? Let's read verses 15 and 16 together, "At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead." The overseer noticed that these four boys, who lived in the sight of God, looked much more beautiful and strong than the other young people who had eaten of the king's food. From then on, he gave them vegetables and water for

the following 3 years of training. In this way, they could keep themselves pure and confess and hold on to their identity as God's people at every meal. It looked impossible at first that Daniel and his friends, could put into practice their decision not to defile themselves with the king's food and wine. But where there is a decision of faith, God always makes a way.

When M. Dr. Samuel Lee decided to spiritually pioneer the then Soviet Union by faith in the 1980s, praying for the fall of the Iron Curtain between Eastern and Western Europe, it seemed extremely unlikely that anything would move there in the near future, perhaps comparable to what is happening today between North and South Korea. But God was very pleased by the decision of faith and the prayer of faith of M. Dr. Samuel Lee. God opened the way for the first missionaries to be sent to the Soviet Union some time later, and God did no small deeds in the years that followed. God established pioneering works in numerous university cities there, also founded many God-centered and mission-centered families of faith in the former USSR, and also sent out native shepherds and shepherdesses as missionaries to other countries.

What happened next to Daniel and his 3 friends? Let's read verse 17 together, "To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds." God gave Daniel and his three friends insight and understanding for every kind of writing and wisdom. As they struggled by faith in God to live with identity as God's people, God gave them wisdom and understanding in various areas. When Daniel lived before God, God was with him. His insight was no longer limited by the human or Babylonian perspective. God allowed him to understand the dreams and visions of God that God gave to people as His messages. Daniel was thus also able to communicate God's message to people in an understandable way. Thus, God used him as His prophet in those days.

Finally, let us look at verses 18 to 21. After three years of training, Daniel, his friends and all the other students were brought before the king for the final examination. It was also the entrance examination for the royal service. It was an exciting, critical moment for everyone involved. They had prepared intensively for this for three years. If they failed now, they might be found useless and possibly killed. The king personally felt out each examinee. He wanted to find out exactly who he was dealing with. King Nebuchadnezzar was a very strong personality. Academically, he probably didn't know as much as the students, but he had a very good sense of a person's spirit. In Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, he sensed a special spirit that went far beyond academic and human abilities. He noticed that they did not live with the spirit of fear. Nebuchadnezzar knew nothing of the faith decision of Daniel and of his friends. But he noticed that they were people with backbone, full of the spirit of power, love and prudence. In all things that the king asked Daniel and his friends, he found them ten times wiser and more understanding than all the sign interpreters and wise men in all his kingdom. Thus, Daniel and his friends passed the recruitment test and were accepted into the king's service. Daniel served not only King Nebuchadnezzar, but a total of five Babylonian kings until the first year of the Persian King Cyrus. He became an influential global spiritual leader who had a great impact on the history of God's people and on the entire history of world salvation.

Here we learn how to grow into the global spiritual leaders and good shepherds for our generation and be used by God. It starts with a faith decision to live as God's holy people in all circumstances. It starts with a small decision like that of Daniel and his three friends to keep God's commandment and belong to the people of God. It seemed like a small, insignificant thing at first that they ate 3 meals of vegetables and water a day for 3 years, while all the other young candidates chosen for royal training around them ate and drank delicious food and drink from the king's table. Imagine what a daily struggle it must have been and what an impact they made on the

other fellow students. At first you didn't see any difference between them and the other young men. They were all beautiful, healthy, smart and capable, and from noble tribes to boot. But during those 3 years a great difference arose between Daniel and his friends and the others. Daniel and the 3 had received from God the spirit of God, his wisdom and his understanding. At every meal they had to renew their decision and often endure the ridicule of their fellow students. But God helped them to hold on to their identity as God's holy people and not to make themselves unclean. Thus, God gave them a mind ten times wiser and more understanding than the others.

Among our young people there are also some like Daniel and his three friends. It seems insignificant that with a decision of faith they forgo inviting their classmates to a birthday party on Sunday because Sunday is the Lord's Day. It is strange for their classmates to renounce worldly scolding because they have made a faith decision to do so before God based on a word from God. Similarly, a student's faith decision to read only good books looks insignificant at first glance. But the difference with the students who also read bad and ungodly books is definitely big even after 3 years. As Daniel and his 3 friends confessed their identity at every meal, they also confess their faith on a daily basis by living differently and fighting the spiritual battle for it. They strive to cooperate and hold on to their identity as the holy people of God through the community of life, through early morning prayer and through the battle of words with their parents. Because they, like Daniel and his 3 friends, hold fast to their faith decision, they too can grow into women and men of God who are filled with God's spirit and wisdom. God can then use them preciously for His work of salvation.

Through today's text, we learn how to live and please God in this secular world like Daniel with clear identity as God's people. May God use our Bible Study, Life Community, Early Morning Prayer, Master Classes, Bible Conferences, and GLE Forum preciously that we may live like Daniel with clear

identity as the people of God and grow into shepherds and global spiritual leaders. Like Daniel, let us make a decision of faith before God, our Creator and Lord, not to defile ourselves with the food and wine of the ungodly world. And let us obey God's Word more than men or circumstances. God will then surely be very pleased and use us for the spiritual revival of Germany and Europe and for His world mission work, especially the M-mission. Amen.