**DANIEL CHAPTER 1**

This morning we’re beginning a brand new study – the book of Daniel. I want you to think back for a moment to a time when you were a teenager. Imagine that back then our nation had been attacked and defeated by the Soviet Union. Suppose that you had been taken away from your family and friends to a strange land with different customs, language and religions. As a teenager, how do you think you would have reacted to such an upheaval in your life? Would you have been angry with God? Would you have feared going to an unfamiliar place? Might you have despaired about dreams that you knew now would never be fulfilled? Well, that’s exactly the situation that a young Jewish boy named Daniel faced.

History tells us that in 605 B.C. the mighty Babylonian army led by the cruel King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Palestine and defeated Daniel’s people, the nation of Judah. Their capital city, Jerusalem, was besieged and Daniel and many others were taken captive. They were led away as prisoners to Babylon – a far off land some 500 miles north and east of Jerusalem across the Arabian Desert. As far as we know Daniel never again saw his mother or father or sisters or brothers. He never again worshipped in a Jewish synagogue with God’s people. Never again was Daniel a free man. The rest of his long life would be spent in foreign captivity. Toward the end of Daniel’s life the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire but Daniel remained in Babylon until his death. What a tragic and difficult situation this must have been, especially for someone so young!

But, as we will learn, Daniel was an extraordinary person. Three times in the Book of Daniel he is referred to as a man “greatly loved” by God. Not once does the Bible have a negative comment about Daniel. In the book of Daniel we see a fine young man committed to his God and to a life of holiness despite the unpleasant circumstances he faces. Daniel grows to become a middle-aged public servant committed to worshiping God even when the laws of evil men made such worship illegal. Finally, at the end of this book we see an elderly Daniel still willing to die for his faith in God.

Daniel’s devotion to God never wanes. Daniel’s entire life is one of consistent godly living, integrity and uncompromising faith in the midst of the evil paganism of Babylon he has been forced to live in. The book of Daniel teaches us that we cannot always choose our circumstances, but we CAN with God’s help choose to make the best of bad situations.

So with that brief introduction let’s look at Chapter 1.

READ Daniel 1:1-2. There are two basic reasons why God’s judgment has fallen on His covenant people the Jews: First, the nation’s disobedience to the word of God. Do you remember when we studied Jeremiah and King Jehoiakim of Judah was handed a scroll containing the written word of God? Do you remember what he did with it? He took out his penknife and cut it up into pieces and tossed the scraps of paper into the fire (Jeremiah 36:23).

The second reason for God’s judgment was Judah’s worship of idols rather than worshipping the one true God. As a result God allowed the nation of Judah to be taken into captivity to Babylon, a country filled with paganism and idolatry. They learned their lesson. After 70 years of captivity the Jews would never again returned to idol worship. The lesson for all of us is that we must be very careful to guard our hearts and minds. Look around at our world. It is easy to become enslaved and ruled by any number of modern day idols.

[Question 1] Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is a ruthless, conquering and powerful king; Jehoiakim, king of Judah is a defiant and now a defeated king; and the Lord is the Sovereign King of the universe.

[Question 2] The Lord gives Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. Later in Daniel we are reminded that God the Most High rules in the affairs of men. He is the One who puts people in power and He is the One who removes them. God raises up Nebuchadnezzar to dethrone Jehoiakim and to carry His people away – all part of God’s judgment.

READ Daniel 1:3-4. Some translations use the word “children” in verse 4, but these were actually young people or teenagers, so the word “youths” is better. Who are these young men that the king selected? They are the cream of the crop of Judah’s youth. Many are the sons of Jewish nobility and all possess strong physical and mental capabilities. In modern terms they would have been a virtual Who’s Who of Jewish Teens. These are exceptional young men with social poise. They are cultured and well mannered. Nebuchadnezzar selects these young men for special training for the ultimate purpose of entering the king’s personal service. It’s interesting to note the requirements they are looking for…

[Question 3] A lot of requirements are being sought, but high moral integrity apparently is not one of the things on their list. They want good-looking, healthy and intelligent young men with a certain level of competency. They enroll them in a curriculum that will indoctrinate them into the Chaldean culture. They are to be subjected to the academic, philosophical and the religious ideas of the godless Babylonian culture. This includes all sorts of pagan philosophies and superstitions. Can you imagine the moral crisis that these young Jewish men faced? They will be taught philosophies and superstitions as truth – things that are in direct opposition to everything they had been taught in their Jewish upbringing back home.

This is similar to what a lot of young Christian men and women face in our world today. They are raised to believe one truth at home and in the church. Then they graduate high school and head off to a secular college. There they are indoctrinated with a secular viewpoint. Instead of leaning on the truth from the Word of God, they are told to lean on the theories of men.

READ Daniel 1:5. Not only do these guys face a crisis of the mind, but they also face a crisis of the body. The Babylonians want to change their appetites by giving them a taste of the best Babylon had to offer, specifically food and drink from the king’s table. What could be wrong with that? Well for one thing the food and wine are a part of the offerings to the pagan gods. More importantly, however, God had called certain foods as unclean and the Jews were forbidden to touch it (Leviticus).

This is a spiritual picture of how the devil tries to get us to compromise. He wants us to develop appetites for the things of this world rather than the things of God. He wants us to crave for the material rather than the spiritual. He wants us to be more interested in the things on earth rather than the things above. Nebuchadnezzar had a three-year plan. After that period of time these fine young men would be serving him.

With Satan, it usually takes much less than three years. A very short time dabbling in the things of the world and our attentions are quickly diverted away from the things of God to the joys of the world, which are plentiful. For example, many of us would rather watch TV than read the Bible; we’d rather go to the ballgame or to the lake or to a movie than go to church. We’d rather go dancing than go to outreach visitation. The world has a lot to offer and appeals to our flesh. Though it is not necessarily wrong to enjoy these from time to time, we need to be reminded that we are not here to enjoy life and have fun, but to serve THE KING. We have been made for God’s pleasure, not our own.

READ Daniel 1:6-7. At first reading it seems like a rather harmless thing to change their names. But to the Jews there is a lot of meaning in a person’s name. Every one of the Hebrew boys mentioned here has a name that is a form of the name of God. Daniel means, “God is my judge.” Hananiah means, “Yahweh is gracious.” Mishael means, “Who is He that is God.” Azariah means, “The Lord is help.” Evidently these four young men had parents with faith in the Lord and who wanted to give their sons names of spiritual significance.

But now a pagan king assigns new names to them. Instead of “God is my judge,” Daniel was given the name Belteshazzar, which means, “Bel, protect my life.” A similar story with the other three – Shadrach means, “command of Aku (the moon god)”; Meshach means, “who is what Aku is”; and Abed-nego means, “servant of Nebo.” In each case the Hebrew name contains a name for the true God and the Babylonian name conveys the name of a heathen god.

Daniel is faced with a moral dilemma. What is a God-fearing Jew supposed to do? Tough decisions, right? Not so for Daniel. READ Daniel 1:8. Daniel makes up his mind that he will not defile himself. He makes a decision. Life is a series of decisions. We live on the basis of the decisions we make; what we intend to do and how we will respond. Where and what we are today is a result of a series of decisions we made in the past. What we will be tomorrow will be determined by the decisions we make today. We haven’t even gone halfway through the first chapter and we already see that Daniel makes a decision to stand for what is right. Doing what is right begins by resolving in ones heart to do so.

[Question 4] Notice that Daniel is not defiant. He seeks permission. He recognizes there is an earthly authority over him and he appeals to that authority. Daniel has strong moral convictions, but he handles them in a humble way. As it turns out God is already at work in the situation.

READ Daniel 1:9. Daniel has something going for himself. He has gained the favor of the person in charge of their physical preparation. The man is sympathetic to Daniel’s dilemma. However READ Daniel 1:10. The officer in charge denies Daniel’s request. His position is that, “I have way too much to lose.” It isn’t just his job he’s concerned about, but his life! But Daniel doesn’t give up.

[Question 5] The steward in charge likes and respects Daniel. He listens to and trusts Daniel and goes along with Daniel’s next suggestion. Is this because the steward is such a good judge of character or because Daniel is so persuasive? No. “God gave Daniel favor.” This tells us that God is at work in the situation.

So what is Daniel’s suggestion? Let’s read on.

READ Daniel 1:11-13.

[Question 6] Daniel suggests a strict vegetarian diet for ten days. “At the end of the ten days check us out,” he says.

READ Daniel 1:14-16. The steward in charge listens to Daniel. Why? Because of God’s influence. Remember, God is at work!

[Question 7] The appearance of Daniel and his three friends is better than the appearance of the other young men who had been on the king’s diet. The steward can’t argue with the results and he allows them to continue their diet. Once again we see God working!

READ Daniel 1:17-20. Daniel and his friends surpass everybody else in their graduating class and at the end of their three-year training they are presented to King Nebuchadnezzar.

[Question 8] So impressed is the king by these four men that he assigns them to his personal service and consults them on matters frequently.

READ Daniel 1:21.

[Question 9] Daniel remains in Babylon the rest of his life. He never gets to return to his homeland. Through all the various changes in administration over all those years, there is one constant – Daniel (and his God). After everybody else is gone, Daniel remains. He is there from the beginning of Judah’s captivity all the way up to the time that Cyrus the king of Persia issued his decree freeing the Jews (in Ezra Chapter 1). And God is right there alongside him. As we will see as we go through the book of Daniel in the next couple of months he will remain a man of uncompromising faith.

I urge you to remain faithful in your commitment to righteous living. Don’t ever compromise your faith in God just to be accepted by your society. Be true to God no matter how others around you will judge your actions. Do what you know is right. Even if God has you taken away captive to a foreign country, you stand firm! Don’t waver! Remember that right up to the end God has a purpose for you – a bigger purpose than you could ever imagine!