

# Swimming Upstream: When God's Way is the Hard Way

## Part 1 - Daniel and the King's food

### Israel is Taken Captive

#### Daniel 1:1-4

*1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.*

- In the third year of Jehoiakim = 605 B.C.
- Israel is conquered by Babylon and it was normal to the conquering King to bring in the best of his new captives to advise him on ruling the newly conquered the land
- This would also help the King assimilate the conquered people into forgetting their own culture and identify as a part of Babylon. It is much easier to rule over a unified people.
- In order to be able to counsel the king they would need to know learn a new language and the basics about the law and culture of Babylon.
- 4 Jewish youths were chosen to go into training to be able to advise the king well.
- They were not only youths in this training, young boys from every culture Babylon conquered would have gone through this.

### The Chosen Youths are Pressured to Disobey God

#### Daniel 1:5-7

*5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.*

- The training is three years long.
- Over these three years of training and during their service to the King they are given the same food that the king ate, a very high honor for a conquered slave.
- However, God had established rules for what the Jewish people could and could not eat. The King did not know God and did follow His laws on food.
- For the boys to eat the same thing the king ate would they would be breaking God's law.
- They are faced with a choice, to disobey God and eat what was served to them, or to obey God and reject the kings food.
  - Rejecting the kings food could be seen as an insult to the king and they could get into a lot of trouble or even killed for doing so.

## Daniel's Faithfulness

*Daniel 1:8-15*

*8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. 9 And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." 11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,*

*12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." 14 So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. 16 So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.*

- Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself and would only eat vegetables, but the chief eunuch is concerned they would not get proper nutrition and would get him into trouble as well.
- Daniel convinces to test them to 10 days, and after the test they seemed better in appearance than everyone else who ate the king's food.
- After seeing that their health had not been affected the chief eunuch continued only serving them vegetables beyond the 10 days.
- This would continue beyond their three years of training and into their years of service advising the king.
- Daniel took a risk to obey God and not the king. Not only that, he gave up eating the choicest most delicious food Babylon could offer and became a vegetarian - yuck.

## God Blesses their Faithfulness

*Daniel 1:17-20*

*17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. 20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. 21 And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.*

- God blessed their obedience and gave them skill and understanding through their training, so much so they became known as the best of all the king's advisors.
- The first year of King Cyrus = 539 B.C.
- Daniel lived this way honoring God with what he ate for 66 years!

Daniel and his friends avoided the luxurious diet of the king's table as a way of protecting themselves from being ensnared by the temptations of the Babylonian culture. They used their diet as a way of retaining their distinctive identity as Jewish exiles and avoiding complete assimilation into Babylonian culture (which was the king's goal with these conquered subjects).

With this restricted diet they continually reminded themselves that they were the people of God in a foreign land and that they were dependent for their food, indeed for their very lives, upon God, their Creator, not King Nebuchadnezzar.

Because of their commitment God placed them in a unique position where they could be a blessing to their captors and build up the society in which they were in, while at the same time allowing them to remain true to God amid extraordinary pressures.

# Discussion Questions

- Do you think following God can sometimes be hard? Give some examples.
- Do you think God sometimes changes his mind on things he has said we should or should not do based on culture or popular opinion?
- Why do you think King Nebuchadnezzar chose youths from Israel to advise him?
- What purpose did it serve to include and train chosen people from the cultures Babylon conquered?
- What kind of food do you think the king ate and also served to the 4 Jewish youths?
- What kind of food do you think the other Jewish captives who were not chosen ate?
- In your own words, why was the decision Daniel made risky?
- What factors do you think made Daniels decision hard?
- Put yourself in Daniels shoes, what would you have missed eating the most?
- What kind of pressure/temptation do you think they experienced seeing, smelling, and talking to people who ate the kings food?
- What ways do you think God blessed Daniel and his friends?
- In what ways do you think they were able to bless the king and his kingdom through their obedience to God?
- Why is God's way always the right way?