

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.”

Welcome to the Global Leadership Empowerment Forum 2023! We thank God for allowing us to deeply study the life of Daniel at this Forum. Who was Daniel? Just a teenager who was kidnapped at the age of 16, but whose life was an unexpected success story? Who rose to become the highest official and closest advisor of the world's rulers? No. He made a small, but important decision of faith in his youth. Because of this life decision, God could use him as an influential Bible Teacher and as God's blessing. God made him a shepherd for Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, and through his prayer a Servant of God for God's people with God's hope and vision. Through this GLEF, let us learn who this Daniel is, whose faith and decision of faith to this day shine “like the brightness of heaven” and “lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

In today's lesson, we learn that God abundantly blesses the one decision of faith to faithfully hold on to our true spiritual identity. Daniel made a clear decision not to make himself unclean by accepting the tempting offerings of the ungodly environment. He did not defile himself with wine and flesh. Rather, he preserve his spiritual identity as a man of God and as one of his people. Like Daniel, let us make a clear decision of faith to stand on the side of God in the midst of these godless times no matter what the cost, so that God raises us as Bible teachers and spiritual leaders for his salvation work.

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

Let us read the first verse together: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” The time Daniel was born into was a very chaotic and turbulent time. The kingdom of Judah was located directly between the three competing great powers of the time:

1. The New Assyrian Empire, which had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC under Shalmaneser V and Sargon II, but had been increasingly weakened by internal crises and civil wars since about 640 BC.
2. The Neo-Babylonian Empire, which made itself independent of Assyria 626 BC under King Nabopolassar and his successor Nebuchadnezzar II, and became more and more powerful and aggressive.
3. Saite Egypt under King Necho II, which saw itself as a “world power” and suspiciously watched rising Babylon.

It was only a matter of time before tensions between the three great powers would erupt. By 610 BC, the Babylonians had conquered Haran, and Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. As a result, the remaining forces of Assyria gathered at Carchemish. Since Egypt wanted to prevent Babylonian supremacy, it entered an anti-Babylonian alliance with the Assyrians. However, King Necho II, when he wanted to unite his forces with Assyrian forces, was stopped at Megiddo by King Josiah of Judah. In 609/608 BC there was the battle of Megiddo, in which Josiah died. It was the start of the Judah's decline, for Judah now became a vassal dependent on Egypt. Necho II deposed Jehohaz' and installed a puppet, Jehoiakim at 608 BC. This expansion of Egyptian power, in turn, provoked the Babylonians. Thus, in 605 BC the three powers clashed at Carcemish for the decisive battle. The Egyptians and Assyrians met the full force of the Babylonian army led by General Nebuchadnezzar II. The result was that the Egyptians and Assyrians were completely destroyed by the Babylonians. This battle had immediate, serious consequences:

1. The Assyrian Empire ceased to exist.

2. Egypt had to cede the entire Levante to Babylon. As a result, it was significantly weakened and thus no longer a significant power in the middle east.
3. The Babylonian Empire became the strongest super power of the Middle East. Judah became a Babylonian vassal.

As Daniel 1:1 testifies, at 605 BC, we are at the 3rd year of King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem for the first time. The first wave of the Jews was deported to Babylon. Daniel and his three friends were also part of this first wave of exile. Let us look at verse 3: "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" Daniel and his friends came from one of the influential Jewish families. They were of noble origin. However, they were now deported to Babylon as humiliated prisoners. King Nebuchadnezzar was smart. He knew that to rule his vast, multicultural empire, he needed the loyalty of the young intellectual elite of the conquered nations. Hence, the chosen young elite was to undergo an intensive three-year elite training by learning the literature, life, and language of the Chaldeans. After those three years, they would serve the king at his court. Daniel and his friends were also young and capable. So, they belonged to the next generation of leaders that was supposed to lead Judah, but was now deported into exile. As those young next generation leaders, they were also chosen to receive the three-year elite education at Nebuchadnezzar's court.

Let us look at verses 5 and 6: "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." From a human point of view, they might be proud to be in the top 1%. But for a heavy price. They had to completely submit to the idolatrous Babylonian culture. They had to give up everything of their life so far. The king even determined what they should eat from now on. Even their names were reversed: Daniel ("God is judge") became Belteshazzar ("Baal protects the king"). Hananiah ("God is great") became Shadrach ("reign of the moon god"). Mishael ("Who is like God?") became Meshach ("Who is like the moon god?"). Azariah ("God has helped") became Abed-Nego ("servant of Nergal"). A person's name is very important. It says something about a person's identity and vision. Daniel and his friends had to give up their meaningful Jewish names. Instead, they were given new names derived from the Babylonian gods and idol culture. It was very tempting to abandon their spiritual background and leave their faith in God behind.

Our teenagers and young adults like Peter J. C., Daniel Gates or Sarah S. and the intellectual students on campus are in a very similar situation. Like Daniel, they are also the young future spiritual Next Generation leaders. Today's society is spiritually like today's Babylon. In schools and universities, worshipping God, and Europe's spiritual heritage is strongly criticized and relativized. On the other hand, the wine and flesh of the teachings of humanism propose a life without God, justifying homosexuality and gender-ideology. The Nebuchadnezzar of the godless zeitgeist wants the next generation to drink the wine of an egoistic lifestyle in which humans proclaim to be their own king of life. In this environment, it is very easy for the next generation to lose our spiritual identity as God's people, as shepherds, and Bible teachers. Instead, we are tempted to adapt to the worldly, godless, idol-worshipping lifestyle.

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

2. Daniel's decision of faith and God's blessing (8-21)

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." Nebuchadnezzar's food was unclean for several reasons. From Leviticus 11, Daniel knew about God's laws about food that he had once given Moses for the Israelites to live the spiritually holy life. These laws were about consuming clean and unclean animals. However, what was even more serious was that what Nebuchadnezzar ate and drunk had previously been offered to idols. This matter of eating was not a small, neglectable thing. Indeed, it was a very serious issue for Daniel

and his faith and identity, since God clearly did not allow His holy people to eat from food offered to idols. (Exodus 34:15).

Thus, Daniel made a clear decision of faith before God not to defile himself with the idol culture of the Babylonians. Rather, he decided to hold firm to the holy life with God. He made a firm decision of faith to absolutely hold on to his true spiritual identity. Daniel did not make his decision of faith according to his feelings or because he felt like it. No! When he made that decision of faith, he made a deliberate decision for the spiritual identity according to God's word. Daniel did not make this decision lightly. Rather, he was indeed 100% aware of what it meant to make this decision of faith. Daniel's decision was not to make himself unclean by the idol food of the Babylonian king. Daniel made a clear decision to preserve his spiritual identity as God's holy nation and as a royal priest, whatever the cost: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (Exodus 19:5, 6) Daniel lived before the eyes of his almighty Creator and Lord and wanted to please Him. 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 that the right relationship with God, who was his Lord and creator, was more important to him than a good education or a promising future. He was even willing to risk his life for this. He did not want to make any compromise on this.

Marie Durand was a French Protestant, who were called "Huguenots". During this period, the Huguenots experienced the harshest persecution from Nebuchadnezzar who was Louis IV, the "Sun King". He wanted to force the Huguenots back to catholic state faith. She was arrested in 1730. At that point. She was only 19 years old. She also belonged to the next generation of Huguenots. But 38 years she spent in prison. Again and again she and her fellow prisoners in the tower of the Constance in Augies-Mortes were tempted to renounce. Her brother, one of the most important leaders of the Desert Church, was executed. But despite all this, she made a clear decision of faith like Daniel: With "Resiste" – not to drink the wine of renunciation and a safe life; but at all costs to hold firm to the true spiritual identity as a holy people and royal priestess. God used her as an influential shepherdess for her fellow prisoners. Until today, she is a brightly shining star forever for many believers.

Our young NG has decided not to defile themselves with the flesh and wine of the zeitgeist, materialism and godless humanism. These flesh and wine propose egoistic self-realization, rebellion, gambling, social media, and lustful desires. But the NG leaders have already made a clear decision of faith, like Daniel, to preserve their spiritual identity as a holy people and as a royal priesthood. Sarah Schweitzer, Joshua Elsholz and Samuel A. C. have made a clear decision of faith not to make themselves unclean with the wine of lustful desires and egoistic life; but to hold on to their true spiritual identity as royal priests by standing on God's side with 1 Pet 4:13 so that God preciously uses them as Bible teachers and as campus shepherds. The young NG like Andrea or Esra S. have made a clear decision of faith to eat the water and vegetables of the Bible study. Thus, through GLEF 2023, God lets them grow as excellent SEBTs for the five books of Moses. May God help each of us as next Generations like Daniel to make the clear life decision of faith before God, our Creator and Lord. May God help us to firmly hold on to that decision whatever the cost, as Daniel did. God will be very pleased and will certainly bless this.

In my old life, I lived without a spiritual identity. I consumed the flesh and wine of godless humanism. Hence, I rebelled against God to fulfill my youthful desires. But through Heb 5:8-9 God let me meet Jesus. Jesus was the Son of God. But He took all my sin upon himself. He died on the cross to give me eternal salvation. Thanks and praise be to God, who changed me by 180°. God allowed me to make the firm decision of faith like Daniel to firmly hold to my true spiritual identity: That God has called me as a father of many nations and as a spiritual leader for the campus students. Thanks be to God, who helps me through common life, early prayer and GLEF to eat the refreshing water and tasty vegetables every day. In this spiritually corrupt world, this fresh water of intensive IBS roots me even deeper in God's spiritual identity like Daniel. God doesn't want me to drink the wine of the zeitgeist to live as an ordinary, becoming physician. Rather, like Daniel, God wants to use me as a shepherd and Bible teacher who shines like a star forever and ever. With Jn 10:11 "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" I may hold firmly to my true spiritual

identity as a royal priest and holy nation, no matter what the cost might be. In Dan, Hargun and Ali I may make 3 friends who have also made this clear decision of faith like Daniel. God works through one holy stump's decision of faith, that he also uses me like Daniel as a shepherd and Bible teacher to pioneer 12 universities for God's spiritual revival work.

How did God bless Daniel and his friends' decision of faith? After Daniel had made the decision of faith not to make himself unclean with the king's food and wine, he convinced his three friends. It looked impossible that Daniel would be able to put his decision into action. But Daniel found a way as he trusted in God's help. By God's grace, the chief eunuch was favored Daniel and his friends. Although it was very dangerous for the eunuch, he wanted to support Daniel by finding a suitable overseer for Daniel and his friends.

In verse 12, Daniel said to the overseer, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink." What was the result after the ten-day test? Let us 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." Daniel and his 3 friends, who lived before God, looked much more handsome and stronger than the other young people who had eaten the king's food. From then on, the overseer gave them vegetables and water. In this way, they were able to keep themselves clean and hold on to their identity as God's people at every meal. Where there is a decision of faith, God always creates a way.

After three years of training, Daniel, his friends, and all the other students were brought before the king for their final exams. It was critical moment for everyone involved. They had been preparing intensively for three years for this. Those who failed would be removed. Nebuchadnezzar knew nothing of Daniel's decision of faith and of his friends. But he noticed that they were not afraid. Rather, they were full of the strong spirit of God, love and prudence: "In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."

Here we learn how to grow to be the global spiritual leaders and good shepherds like Daniel. It begins with one clear decision of faith to live as God's holy people, no matter what the cost. It begins with a small but clear and consistent decision of faith to keep and obey God's commandment under all circumstances and to belong to God's people. It seemed like a small decision without any relevance. For 3 years, they ate 3 meals a day vegetables and water, while all the other young candidates chosen for the royal training around them ate and drank delicious food from the king's table. At first, there was no difference between them and the other young men. They were all handsome, healthy, smart, capable and from the nobility. But after 3 years, one could see a heaven-and-earth difference between Daniel, his 3 friends and the others. God gave them a mind ten times wiser and more understanding than the others.

Daniel's clear decision of faith to hold on to his spiritual identity, no matter what the cost, was the starting point for God to use Daniel as an influential shepherd and Bible teacher. God used him as a shepherd for King Nebuchadnezzar, a proud ruler of a world empire. Nebuchadnezzar finally testified to God: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." (Dan 4:31) God also used him as a shepherd for Darius. At the brink of being killed by hungry lions, he stayed faithful to his decision of faith and in prayer with the hope and vision of God, no matter what the cost (Dan 6:11). God saved him from the lions, so that Darius also witnessed the sovereign God of Daniel. Daniel served a total of five Babylonian kings until the first year of the Persian king Cyrus.

But what was way more important was that Daniel grew up as a next generation shepherd and Bible teacher for his people because he had made this clear decision of faith. Daniel didn't say, "This doesn't concern me because I've been in Babylon most of my life," or "I'm not to blame for the suffering of the Israelites," or "I'm old."

1. As a shepherd for his people, he took upon himself the sin of his people. He came to God in sackcloth and ashes, in prayer for repentance and interceded for his people: "Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord,

- hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name." (Dan 9:19). Daniel asked God's one-sided grace for the spiritual restoration of His people as a royal priesthood and as God's holy people.
2. Daniel lived as a Bible teacher for his people (9:2), who fought with the prince of God in the spiritual battle against the princes of Persia and Greece (Dan ch. 10), so that God's salvation plan and God's sovereign history could be continued.
 3. Daniel actively sought God's counsel for his people. In this way he could learn about God's great hope and vision for his people: The Antichrist would harshly persecute the believers, blaspheme against God and cruelly oppress them. But he will be broken by God (8:25). God will restore His people as a royal priesthood and establish His eternal kingdom with them: "He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (7:14) All this had already been surely determined by God (11:36).

Through this clear decision of faith and this life of prayer as a Bible teacher and shepherd for the believers, God used Daniel as an influential Bible teacher "at that time": "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever." (Dan 12:3) Outwardly, the situation seemed to be hopelessly lost. In 586 BC, Jerusalem was completely destroyed and burned down. The Jews fled, were killed or taken into exile. But because one holy stump Daniel made a clear decision of faith to be used by God as a royal priest and as a shepherd and Bible teacher, this time was no longer a time of resignation and sadness! Rather, God used one holy stump to prepare this time for the spiritual restoration of His people through Daniel! God bless this GLEF 2023 that we, the next generation, as holy stumps "at that time", may make the clear decision of faith to hold on to God's true spiritual identity for us. God blesses Daniel Gates' decision of faith to hold firm to his spiritual identity as a bible teacher who seeks God's sovereign counsel. God makes him 10 times wiser by using him as a Bible teacher and shining shepherd like Daniel for the young students in Rutgers, New Jersey, and America! God sees Sarah Schweitzer's decision of faith to hold firm to her spiritual identity as a spiritual blessing and mother of many nations, so that God uses her as an influential Bible teacher for her friends and for World Mission to Cartagena! God also sees Sh. Lydia Points decision of faith to hold firm to her spiritual identity as a god-fearing woman and as a bible teacher like Lydia. God wants to bless her decision of faith and use her like Daniel as a shepherdess for the campus students in Turkey and CIS to raise 120 Mission base camps to pioneer the Muslim world!

Today we learn how to live and please God in this secular world, like Daniel, with a clear identity as God's people. When Daniel made his decision of faith, he was in his young teenage years as one of the next generations leaders. Like Daniel, let us make a clear, consistent and firm decision of faith before God, our Lord and creator, not to defile ourselves with the food and wine of the ungodly world. Rather, may God preciousely use our 1:1-BS, common life, early prayer, and the GLEF 2023, that the next generation may renew their and our true spiritual identity as the people of God and as a royal priesthood and grow into the shepherds and global spiritual leaders. Let us obey God's Word more than people or circumstances, no matter what the cost might be. God blesses the firm decision of faith of one holy stump and the NG to use us as Bible teachers and shining stars forever and ever, for spiritual revival in Germany, Europe, America, CIS and the M-world.