

Steadfast through captivity

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[0 : 00] ...thoughts to Daniel, this young man who served God so faithfully, so steadfastly, despite the fact that he was carried far from home and left in strange surroundings.

Perhaps in bringing this subject before your notice this morning, perhaps I should try to fill in quickly for you the background to the life and times of Daniel.

Now, first of all, you've got to conceive of the mighty power and empire of Assyria.

And we notice that this mighty empire of Assyria, that about the time that Daniel was born, the power of Assyria was beginning to wane.

And biblical history and secular history both combine to provide interesting data of the times in which Daniel was born.

[1 : 33] Assyria, as a mighty empire, was breaking up. And its decline was hastened by the death in 625 BC of its great monarch, Assyria.

Now, it is to be noted that Daniel, the prophet of God, was born in the very same year that Assyria died.

Assyria died. Assyria was born in the very same year that Daniel, the prophet of God, was born in the olden days of the father of Nebuchadnezzar. He was born in the very same year that Daniel, the prophet of God, was born in the very same way that Daniel passed down.

And he had a new name in the very same year. The same year in which he succeeded to the Assyrian throne, Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar, sensed that now the time was ripe to lead the Assyrian province in the world of the of Babylon in revolt.

He sensed that the weakling son of Ashurbanipal would not have the spirit to resist the revolt. The revolt proved to be a huge success and Nabopolassar founded what historians call the Neo-Babylon Empire.

[2 : 57] Assyria became weaker and weaker whereas Babylon grew in power and strength. Now about this time away in Judah the infant Daniel was developing physically his infant mind not knowing the destiny he was to fulfill.

For Daniel not only was to see the glory of the Babylonian Empire but he was also to see that empire pass into total oblivion.

To be succeeded by the empire of the Medes and the Persians. One of the great verses in Daniel chapter 1 is the last verse. Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus.

We do not know anything of the parentage of Daniel although it can be guessed that they were godly people for they named their son Daniel which means God is judge or God is my judge.

Josephus in his antiquity states that Daniel and his three companions in exile were all kinsmen of King Zedekiah the son of Josiah.

[4 : 30] So that Daniel seems to have come of royal or at least noble descent which would remind us of Paul writing to the Corinthians and saying not many noble are called but that does not say not any noble are called.

Daniel's background therefore is traceable to royal or noble descent. Little is known of his early life like the life of our Lord Jesus his formative years are passed over in silence.

We can only trace some of the stirring events that took place in those years. For example there was the fall of Nineveh that great city against which Jonah preached and prophesied and the fall of Nineveh was one of the epochs of history one of the most history making events to occur and it occurred early in Daniel's life.

At home there was religious revival which Daniel saw when he was about 15 years of age.

Daniel witnessed the revival brought about by Josiah whose proclamation led the nation of Judah back to God after many years of backsliding.

[6 : 10] Josiah's grandfather was Manasseh that wicked king of Judah who had led the nation into terrible wickedness.

But Josiah was a godly man and when he began to read in the book of the law of the Lord which had been long buried in the house of God he repented and he led the nation in repentance and great revival ensued and Daniel was a witness of that revival.

Whereas Josiah had been born to be a king Daniel was born to be a prophet of God and at that time the Lord raised up several prophets who were contemporary with Daniel there was Jeremiah Zephaniah and Nahum and Ezekiel and these men accomplished great things in the service of God repairing the temple of the Lord bringing the nation back to the word of God reestablishing the true system of worship and so that spiritual declension in Israel and Judah was halted and Daniel was witness to this great revival of a true religion.

Obviously this had an effect upon Daniel's life. whereas the revival had no effect whatever on Josiah's family yet Daniel was tremendously moved by it.

The godly upbringing which we can deduce from his name bore fruit in his life. God is my judge.

[8 : 14] God is my life. It is obvious that Daniel had formed habits of piety and devotedness to God and he lived according to a resolute purpose that God would be supreme in his life.

If there is one thing more than another that shines out of the pages of the book of Daniel it is this that in Daniel's heart and life God had supremacy.

Now it so happened that Josiah afraid of the growing power and the menace of Babylon he presumed to forestall Pharaoh Necho the king of Egypt leading an army to the aid of Assyria the enemy of Babylon and he led his forces against the Assyrians hoping to forestall the small army of Josiah was easily defeated Josiah himself was slain in battle and it was the prophet Jeremiah who led the lamentation of the nation for that godly king the king's sons they cared nothing for the kingdom nor for religion they despised the prophets of the

Lord the help for Assyria by Egypt proved to be unavailing and Babylon and Babylon became the world power Nebuchadnezzar was not to take things lying down the first thing he sought to do was to chastise Egypt for their defiance in order to chastise Egypt he had to make his way through the small kingdom of Judah he did this and he swept Judah into his power and he deported the best of the people of Judah he deported the best of them to Babylon Judah you see had failed to heed the warnings of Isaiah and Micah and Jeremiah and so judgment fell upon the nation for Judah there was disaster the people were led into captivity amongst them

Daniel and his companions well although there was disaster for the nation brought into captivity yet God raised up Daniel to be a leader amongst the exiles and to teach the people the law of God how wonderful is the sovereignty of God that in a time of national crisis and disaster he would always have an individual raised up to fulfill his divine purpose for his people and so that is how the book of Daniel opens it refers us first of all to the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar and the deportation of Daniel and his companions and many others into the strange land of

[12:17] Babylon people the first thing we notice then in this chapter is the captivity of Daniel taken to a strange country having strange customs to a strange court it is very interesting to trace the providential dealings of God with his people how he raised up men who were able to insinuate themselves into the highest places of power think of Joseph in Egypt think also of Mordecai in Persia in the book of Esther and here we have Daniel in the court of Nebuchadnezzar this was a severe trial for such a young man

Daniel at this time would have been about 15 years of age he was happy in his companions Shadrach Meshach and Abednego for they shared his faith they remained steadfast in their religion and they were welded together in the bonds of a companionship that could not be broken in this respect we may have regard also to Paul's situation when he wrote to the Philippians and reminded them of his companions he said I suppose it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and companion in labor

John also the apostle when he wrote those letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor he said I am John who also am your brother and companion in tribulation and Paul writing to the Hebrews in the 10th chapter and the 33rd verse he said called called to remembrance the former days in which after ye were illuminated ye endured a great fight of afflictions partly whilst ye were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used my dear friends it is a great thing in life to have true companions let me remind you of the meaning of the word companion it means with bread one who is such a friend to you that he will go the length of sharing his bread with you so David the psalmist he said in prayer to God

I am a companion of all those that fear thee that is the best companionship to be a companion of those that fear God and then God himself becomes the companion of his people for he shared his bread with his people he gave his son who is the bread of heaven the bread of life so those were Daniel's companions in the tribulation then they were faced with this crisis there was imposed upon them a foreign diet they were to worship foreign deities these two things brought a crisis into the lives of these young men were they to take this foreign diet were they to worship this foreign deity

God often allows a crisis in his people's lives to test and draw out their true character in order to make them strong to resist temptation this is what happened to Daniel and his friends Daniel had a conscience about this and Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat because after all of this in all likelihood would have first of all been offered to false idols this crisis which awoke Daniel's conscience caused him to reflect upon his home training and his personal religious fidelity like

[17:56] Joseph of ancient times when he exclaimed to Potiphar's wife how can I do this great evil and sin against God here we see the advantage of godly upbringing I was much affected by this when I was in Livonia and heard members of the congregation recounting to me their former experiences of their religious training in the free church in the island of Lewis and how that training stayed with them all during their lives especially when for the sake of earning a livelihood they emigrated to America to the area of

Detroit the center of the motor car industry and a unique situation developed there because there came quite a company of men and women from Lewis and a Scottish community was formed and a Lewis society was formed and several of those people told me of their experiences and how by reason of their godly home training in the shorter catechism in the principles of the free church the system of worship they could not go in with the style of life that was practiced and oft times they were delivered from temptation as they reflected upon their home training how strengthening this was to them in a strange land with strange customs so they made their choice as Daniel made his choice he would not compromise his faith true enough he was far from home in a strange country what would be the harm then in eating of the king's food which had been offered to idols it would only be a slight compromise wouldn't it and besides very few would know about it therefore what harm in partaking of Babylonian food

Daniel knew that even in this matter he would be compromising his faith all that he had stood for and he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's food what a lesson we can learn here from the character of this young man far from home confronted with this testing no he said with resolution i will not defile myself and yet there shines through in his approach to this matter another aspect of his character he did not show any rebelliousness but rather he displayed true courtesy he did not complain to

Melser the prince of the eunuchs but rather he showed all the courtesy to him and he requested that he might not defile himself he requested always the gentleman daniel did not behave rebelliously or riotously rather he used courtesy and politeness in fact he exhibited the spirit of meekness he requested of Melser that he might be allowed to refuse the king's food but now we come to consider daniel's countenance because this is what

Melser feared he said i fear my lord the king who hath appointed your meat and your drink for why should he see your face's worst liking than the children which are of your sort then shall you make me endanger my head to the king Melser judged rightly that if daniel and his companions kept to this restricted diet of vegetables that this would be reflected in their faces their countenance would show it and he was afraid that he would be brought to account for this by Nebuchadnezzar it is the countenance that shows up our state of health especially our spiritual health that is why

[24 : 27] David soliloquized with himself in psalms of 42 and 43 he said why art thou cast down O my soul why art thou disquieted within me hope in God for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God and daniel knew this secret also something which was hidden to the prince of the babylonian eunuchs that god is the health of a christian's countenance you see god was quick to recognize the fallen countenance of cain that you remember he said to him why art thou wroth and why is thy countenance fallen so it is that our countenance reflects the state of our spiritual lives melter feared for daniel and his companions but it was a groundless fear because daniel knew where in his true health lay it was in a proper relationship with god because daniel kept up a life of prayer with god he studied the word of god and like moses who was in the mount with god when he descended moses wist not that his countenance shone so we come to consider daniel's culture daniel had a great care for his soul he was a man who studied the word of god who lived a life of prayer and he was not slack in increasing his knowledge and because of his earnestness god gave to him and to his companions skill in wisdom cunning in knowledge and understanding science daniel was well trained intellectually and spiritually hence his rise to prominence in the court of nebuchadnezzar this is one of the fine scripture illustrations of how god promotes those who honor him and his word he takes care of his own people even in the most adverse situations as jesus said the father himself loveth you and your heavenly father know it daniel was possessed of great capability which nebuchadnezzar recognized and he promoted daniel even as potiphar and pharaoh in egypt recognized the capabilities of joseph who also gained promotion to the court of the egyptians then i want you to think of daniel's continuance he got over that crisis concerning the diet

and the deity and consent was given to them and they were proved in that matter and at the end of the period of proving their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all of the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat god rewarded daniel and his companions they had understanding in all visions and dreams this stood to them in good stead later when nebuchadnezzar was troubled by dreams needed their interpretation it was daniel who gave the interpretation and so this wonderful character went on with the lord daniel continued even unto the first year of king cyrus there were so many things happened in his experience in babylon to make him turn back but shining out of this book of daniel is the steadfastness the loyalty of this man to god and to his faith and it is this that

Paul exhorts for in his epistles and in his preaching in the acts of the apostles he said bonds and affliction but none of these things move with me and he exhorted the colossians be not moved away from the hope of the gospel that no man be moved by these afflictions you see God gives grace to enable his people to continue in the faith and this is the mark of their regeneration this is the mark of their final perseverance he said to Paul said to the Colossians that there would be great blessing in their lives that God would effect in them his power and that ultimately they would be presented holy and unblameable and unapprovable before the throne of God if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled and it is this also which the Lord

Jesus imposed upon his disciples also that there is got to be this continuing steadfastly we meet with this in the Acts of the Apostles in the second chapter where those early converts convicted by the Holy Spirit they were converted to God but it is said also of them they continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and in prayers and in the breaking of bread so how wonderful it is to read of the example of this man Daniel who at an early age displayed such faith such qualities of godliness and such steadfastness and loyalty to his god this was put into my mind because of my experience in

Livonia when I witnessed the steadfastness of god's people who in his divine providence and leading had taken them to a strange land place of strange customs but who despite all of these differences in environment and life they remained steadfast and loyal to the training in which they were brought up and they continue to this day a noble people a godly people a people most lovable in disposition and it was a great privilege for me to serve them in the ministry of the word of god bringing this before you this morning I commend them to your prayers and ask that you will remember them as they seek to maintain a witness for the free church of

[33 : 23] Scotland in the Detroit area let us all take example from the steadfastness the loyalty of this man Daniel let us by the grace of God be strong and do exploits for his glory let us pray pray of thee oh lord that thou bless thy people everywhere who today gather for worship and to hold forth the testimony of the gospel bless us throughout this day oh god make it to be a day when we shall be drawn into a closer walk with thee and help us oh god our father to live always with that steadfastness of purpose that thy name through us may be glorified we ask this in jesus name and for his sake amen