

# THE STORY OF DANIEL

by

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“Aunt Hattie’s Bible Stories” for Boys and Girls

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## CHAPTER TWO

### DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS, CAPTIVES IN BABYLON

HAVE you heard the latest news?” asked Daniel, as he met his three friends in the court one morning shortly after the talk on the mountainside.

“No, what is it?” asked the boys in one breath.

“King Jehoiakim has revolted against King Nebuchadnezzar. He has refused to pay tribute any longer.”

Anxiety was written upon each sober face as they looked from one to the other. Finally Daniel said in a low, earnest voice, “The will of our God be done.”

**“And the Lord sent against him (Jehoiakim) bands of the Chaldeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets.**

**“Surely at the command of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did.”**

I wonder how this great army came up against Jerusalem. Did they have machine-guns, poison gas, tanks and bombing planes?

Not at all, for in those days they fought with bows and arrows, swords and spears, and the cavalry had small horse-drawn chariots. However, they were a strong enemy and Jehoiakim, who had turned away from God, was not able to withstand them.

Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem three times.

On the first invasion he carried away all of the princes, the mighty men of valour, the craftsmen and smiths. That is, he took besides the princes, the leading professional and business men and all of the manufacturers. He also went into the Temple and took part of the golden vessels used in the sacrificial offerings and services of the Temple.

Let us again join our friends and see what is happening to them. I think the boys spent a sleepless night and early in the morning heard the rhythmic tramp of soldiers' feet on the cobblestone pavement and the clanking of many swords.

“Halt!” Then a harsh laugh as the captain shouted, “The quarters of the princes! Ha! We’ll take the best of the land and make them our slaves.”

“Bind them! Quickly now—do not miss a single one!” cried the officers. And thus Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah and the other princes with their hands bound behind their backs were made to march out of their loved city of Jerusalem. As they passed, under guard, through the narrow streets, they were joined by many other companies of their fellowmen, prisoners of war.

What a sight! Men of Judah—God’s own chosen race— being punished for the wickedness of the nation and, as is always true, the innocent suffered with the guilty.

What route did they take to Babylon and how far was it?

They probably went north to Damascus and then across the desert, a distance of not less than six hundred miles and they walked every step of the way.

Week after week they journeyed, foot-sore and weary, every mile putting them farther from home and native land.

In writing about it afterwards one of them said (Psalm 137):

**“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.**

**“We hanged our harps on the willows in the midst thereof.**

**“For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.**

**“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?**

**“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.**

**“If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”**

In other words, when our boys and the other captives came to the rivers of Babylon they were so homesick that they sat down and cried for their own city of Zion which is another name for Jerusalem.

“Come on now, slaves, tune up, give us a concert, entertain us, sing us one of your songs,” jeered the cruel soldiers who stood over them, making fun of their tears.

I think some of the disheartened captives picked up their musical instruments which they carried with them and tried to be obedient; but overwhelmed with sorrow, they were unable to tighten a single string and in silence hung their harps on the overhanging branches of the weeping-willow trees which lined the banks of the stream.

Some one has said, “How could they sing Jehovah’s song in a strange land? And, yet, there was a song in the silence, not heard by the cruel oppressors, but heard by Jehovah, Himself. It was the song of the heart remembering Jerusalem, counting it the chief joy of life.”

Let us imagine ourselves in their places. If we were to be carried away to some foreign land and, homesick and heartsick, our captors would try to make us sing the “*Star-Spangled Banner*” or “*My Country, ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty,*” just how would we feel?

The captives with the accompanying army at last reached Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar instructed Ashpenaz, chief officer, to bring to the palace the choicest and best of the captives, especially those of royal blood and the princes from whom were to be selected those to be trained for his service.

The qualifications were stiff; listen to them. They were to be:

**“Children in whom was no blemish, but well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.”**

That is, these young men who were chosen to serve in the palace were to be perfect physically, attractive in personal appearance and good-looking. They were to be thoughtful, sensible and obedient; they should have good minds and the ability to learn readily.

The Bible does not tell us the ages of our four boys when they went to Babylon, but it is thought they were sixteen or eighteen years old. They had probably served several years in the schools of Jerusalem and in the Temple.

One by one the young Hebrews were examined. I do not know how many of the princes of Judah were chosen but we do know that the four loyal friends were among the number and they were the only ones of whom the Bible speaks.

Let us pretend we looked in to see what they did that first night.

“Did they say that we had to go to school three years before we can enter the king’s service?” asked Hananiah.

“That is the way I understand it. We are to attend the king’s private university,” replied Daniel. “Not so bad either, for, in that time, we can learn the Chaldean language and continue our studies of astronomy and the sciences.”

“This is a fine apartment for captives, I’ll say. They seem to be treating us well,” said quiet Mishael. “We ought to be able to do good work even though we are homesick and long for Jerusalem and our loved ones.”

“Listen, some one is coming!”

Presently the door opened and the chief official, Ashpenaz, came in.

“Well, boys, how do you like your quarters?”

“Very well, thank you,” answered the boys in one voice.

“The first thing I am ordered to do for you is to change your names. Daniel, your new name is Belteshazzar; Hananiah’s, Shadrach; Mishael’s, Meshach; and Azariah’s, Abednego. I’ll be seeing you again soon.”

With this, Ashpenaz went away.

Bewildered and disappointed the four boys looked at one another.

Then, I think, Daniel said, “My name means ‘*God is my judge*,’ and this new one, Belteshazzar, is ‘*Bel’s Prince*,’ the name of a heathen god. However, I cannot help what they call me for the name cannot keep me from the one true God who indeed shall continue to be my judge.”

“Yours is no worse than mine,” said Hananiah, “for my name means ‘*Beloved of the Lord*,’ and they have given me Shadrach, which means ‘*illuminated by the Sun-god*.’”

“Listen to mine,” chimed in Mishael, “my name means ‘*Who is as God*,’ and this new one Meshach is interpreted, ‘*Who is like Venus*.’ Some come-down, isn’t it?”

“I think mine is as bad as any of yours,” smiled Azariah. “I always liked my name for it meant ‘*The Lord is my help*,’ and I love to serve the God of my fathers. This new name, Abednego, means ‘*Servant of Nego*,’ a false god.”

“I believe the king has a purpose in these new names,” mused Daniel.

“You are always thinking deeper than we do, what’s in your mind?” queried his friends.

“It is just this. We know how the Chaldeans hate our race. I believe they are trying to make us forget our nation and most of all Jehovah, our God. Boys, let us be faithful to Him, whatever comes.”

Little did our friends think that their initial test of faith would come with the serving of the first official meal the very next morning, the menu of which had been arranged by the king, himself. I think I can see the countenance of Daniel as he looked over his tray and said to himself,

“I do not drink wine, and I know the custom of the heathen is to offer the meat to the gods before eating it. I cannot drink the wine nor defile myself with the meat, for that is against the Law of Moses and I am an Israelite.”

Looking around at the others he saw that they, too, were greatly troubled.

They might easily have said, “There is no use to make a fuss about this food and drink. While we are in Rome we must do as the Romans do. If we are contrary we will have difficulties with the king and the court the very first thing and we will bring trouble upon ourselves.”

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, or with the wine which he drank.

I think Daniel was as winsome as he was determined. He had such a nice way of doing things that the chief commissar had learned to love him and, when Daniel in a pleasant manner said, “I am a Hebrew and do not drink wine nor do I eat meat that has been offered to idols, for that would defile me,” the officer was not angered but reasoned with him kindly for he said, “I am afraid the king will not like it if you refuse to eat this food and drink this wine, for he, himself, has selected it. And, when you and your friends come before him looking poor and ill-fed, not well-nourished as are the others of your class, he will blame me and I will not only lose my job, but my head will come off.”

Again I see that winsome smile set in a face of stern determination, as Daniel said, “Melzar, let us prove up on this. Give us vegetables to eat and water to drink for ten days and then let us stand with the others who eat the king’s meat and see who looks the best and which ever way it goes we will be satisfied.”

Very graciously he humored them in their request and at the end of ten days he made all of the boys stand together.

Looking them over carefully, perhaps he said, “Well, well, I declare, who would have thought it? These four boys who have lived upon vegetables and water are fairer and fatter than those who lived upon meat and wine. From now on all of you will be served the same diet, vegetables and water.”

“As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.”

At the end of three years the king called for the graduating class to present themselves before him.

**“And among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.**

**“And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”**

“Standing by a purpose true,  
Heeding God’s command,  
Honor them, the faithful few,  
All hail to Daniel’s band!

“Hold the gospel banner high!  
On to victory grand!  
Satan and his hosts defy,  
And shout for Daniel’s band.

“Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone!  
Dare to have a purpose firm!  
Dare to make it known!”

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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