

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

Vol. V, No. 5

©Ray R. Sutton, 1991

May, 1991

SACRAMENTAL WARFARE Covenantal Structure of Daniel One

The Book of Daniel has not been allowed, until recently, to be read in Russia. One reason has to do with the prophetic nature of this great book, which concerns the role of a political magistrate within heathen society. With the collapse of the Iron Curtain, this has all changed; at least, it has changed for a little while. The prophetic books can once again be taught. They always have a peculiar effect on the people of God, influencing how they act politically. They provoke the Lord's children to stand before kings and the leaders of this world, bringing us to another reason why perhaps Daniel has been prohibited in Russia.

Another reason why the Book of Daniel would not be able to be preached and taught in oppressive countries concerns its kingly position and tone among books of the Bible. The Old Testament (in the original Hebrew Bible) is divided into three sections: The Law, the Prophets (Joshua through Malachi, and the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Daniel, Lamentations, Job, Chronicles, Esther, and Ezra/Nehemiah). This threefold division reflects the three offices of Christ, each section emphasizing a different aspect of the work of Christ. The Law is priestly in character, providing a history of the origin of the priesthood as well as the specific priestly laws.

The second section of the Hebrew Bible is prophetic, although Christians have been trained not to think of these books as prophetic. It consists of two sections: the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets begin with the Book of Joshua and end with the Kings. Joshua is included because he replaced Moses, who was primarily a prophet (Deuteronomy 18). The Kings are part of the prophetic section because they are to be seen as fulfillment of the Word of God, a key phrase repeating itself throughout these books of the kings: "In order to fulfill the Word of the Lord" (e.g. 1 Kings 2:27). The Latter Prophets are what we normally think of as the prophets. They begin with the great prophet Isaiah and end with Malachi.

"The third part of" the Hebrew Bible, the one in which Daniel is found, is kingly. All of these books have to do with kings in one sense or another, beginning with the Book of Psalms. This great prayer book was primarily written by King David, providing us with the first responsibility of the king, namely, to worship God. The second book in this section, Proverbs, was also written by a king, Solomon, telling of the king's secret of rule, wisdom, which we would expect from the king who asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3). And so, all of the books of this section in one way or another teach us about something to do with kings. Esther tells how the king's heart is changed. Ruth provides the historical background to the genealogy of the greatest king, David, communicating at a much deeper level how a king is raised up from outside the nation Israel and yet

still part of Israel, illustrating the truth of the Incarnation to come: One who was not of Israel yet part of Israel, Jesus.

Kingly Daniel

Finally, we come to Daniel, which is a book about the True King of Jew and Gentile, Yahweh **Elohim**. All through Daniel's life, he is called upon to teach the greatest kings of the world that they are not the true king, by the way, not a comfortable position to be in. For example, in the second chapter of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a giant statue of a man that gets hit by a stone from heaven, causing the colossus to fall to the ground. At face value, this prophetic dream looks very much like the story of David killing the giant, Goliath. David was the true appointed king of Israel. By killing the giant, he proved his Divine appointment. The stone to come in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represents the new David, David's Son and Lord, Jesus. And, the fallen giant in the dream is Nebuchadnezzar and the remains of his empire. Daniel is called upon to deliver an interpretation to the king that he is not the true king of the world, a lesson taught time and again through the lion's den, the fiery furnace and so forth.

And so, Daniel is not necessarily the favorite book of leaders of state, whether they are from Russia or the just-as-humanistic leaders of the United States, for it teaches all of the princes of this world that they are not God. Furthermore, they are called to present their earthly kingdoms to the Kingdom of our Lord, the King of kings. To do so—" involves a covenant.

Daniel is ultimately a book about how God's covenant relationship with His people overcomes Gentile kingdoms. At the beginning, Daniel and his comrades are captives under a tyranny. By means of covenantal faithfulness, they move closer to freedom. Time and again, they are pushed away from leadership in high places. Time and again, they are exalted by God. Why? God is faithful to His covenant promises. As Daniel and his friends live by the covenant, they begin to see the mighty hand of God deliver them just as He did from another Gentile tyranny, Egypt. Thus, the Biblical covenant has a prominent place in the Book of Daniel, conceptually, practically, and structurally, since each of the first six chapters follows the distinct covenant pattern.

Every chapter in the historical section of Daniel has five sections. The opening setting is usually some kind of court scene, with the king found at the center and God positioned as the true King behind even the Gentile king, meaning the first segment communicates the unique transcendence of God, part one of the covenant. Next, a con-

flit usually arises between the hierarchy of the Gentile King and the hierarchy of God, Daniel and his friends, part two of the covenant. Then, Daniel or the other three (Hananiah, Mishael, or Azariah) apply wisdom as the out-working of the ethical stipulation of God's covenant, part three. After this, a test results, determining whose solution will or will not be sanctioned, part four of the covenant. Finally, in every chapter, a transfer of power occurs, making Daniel and people of God the successors of the pagan kingdom, part five of the covenant.

The message of Daniel is powerful once the role of the Biblical covenant is seen and understood. Covenantal faithfulness brings about the downfall of the wicked and the success of the righteous. This process begins in chapter one. Let us examine it in more detail.

Transcendence: The Court (1:1-3)

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along 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 he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his eunuchs, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the seed of the family and nobles.

The Book of Daniel starts with an overt emphasis on the transcendence of God, even though an explanation is given about the capture and transfer of the people of God to Babylon. How is this transcendent, for it may seem that the king of Babylon is Lord? But note carefully what the text says, "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand" (1:2). In other words, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Israel not because of his power but because God is Sovereign, indicating that Yahweh is Lord. This is perfectly consistent with how all Biblical covenants begin, for the first task at hand is always to identify the suzerain.

Our story of Daniel's life, however, further emphasizes the transcendent theme in the early verses, when the young prince's youth group, perhaps better called, the Hebrew Temple Youth Group, is said to be carried away in the "third" year of the reign of Jehoiakim (1:1), king of Judah, to the court of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. It may appear as though the story starts on a gloomy note, but for the student of Scripture, anticipations should be high. The text specifically tells us the defeat occurred in the third year, the time indicator of resurrection throughout the Scriptures. Although we might be tempted to think that captivity in a far away land by God-hating people meant the death of the people of God, this will be a story from beginning to end about their resurrection from death. The worst time in their history occasioned the greatest victory. Indeed, if we read far enough, we will learn of how the Jews' captors eventually finance the rebuilding of the House and City of God, Jerusalem. When God's people lack faith and become disobedient, others are raised up who may at first be enemies but who eventually provoke the original purposes of the Lord.

Daniel's youth group was called upon to be like Samson of old who stormed the gates of the evil city of the Philistines and carried them off, representing the victory of God's Deliverer over the kingdom of Satan; to shut down the entry way sealed off the inhabitants to their own doom; they no longer were protected; they were open to destruction by having become vulnerable to the people of God. In the words later uttered by Christ, Samson proved that the "gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church" (Matthew 16:18). Daniel's youth group was led by God's hand to do in Babylon what Samson had done to the Philistine.

Babylon means "gateway to God," except it ceased to be the "gateway to God" at the Tower of Babel, after which Babylon was named. It became the symbol and place of entry into Satan's kingdom. It is on the plain of Shinar (1:2), the land that was known for its attempts to steal from the people of the Lord; in this case, the "vessels of the House of God" were stolen (1:2). The new serpent for Satan, Nebuchadnezzar, would stop at nothing to prove that his house was the House of God. He thought that control of the vessels of the house meant control of the Lord of the house, as we see a very important symbolism in the way that "vessels" symbolize people, especially in the New Testament (1 Peter). He found out different. He discovered that the Lord controls His vessels, the people, as powerless as they may seem. And, He uses them to accomplish His will.

Nebuchadnezzar's theft of the things of God proved to be his undoing. He committed sacrilege, taking what had been totally dedicated to God. He did what others had tried to do many times, such as Achan (Joshua 7). Yet, no one had actually tried to carry off the vessels of God. He took what was in the House of the Lord to the outside and defiled it. He committed the greatest sacrilege in history to that date. Of course a greater sacrilege would be committed when the Chosen Vessel, Christ, was taken outside Jerusalem to the new Babylon, Golgotha, which probably stands for GOLIATH OF GATH. The penalty for sacrilege was death. Nebuchadnezzar begins to die on the first day the Hebrew youth group come to his court.

Daniel and his friends were found among the "seed" of Israel (1:3), a reference to the Messianic line. They were without "defect," spotless before the eyes of the world, just as our Lord was indeed without sin. They had learned their lessons well and were prepared for spiritual warfare. They possessed wisdom, as well as practical training in leadership; they were ready to serve in the king's court (1:3). Yet, they had not been trained to serve in Satan's court, but in God's. They represented a threat if they were not reconditioned. They had to be taught pagan ways, the religion of Nebuchadnezzar's state.

Daniel and his friends were not literally killed as Christ, the true Seed, would be. Rather, they lived through an attempt on their lives by means of conversion to the religion of Nebuchadnezzar. The king sent a messenger, a eunuch named Ashpenaz, to do his bidding. As in many of the exilic books of the Bible, the eunuch plays a prominent role (e.g. Esther). He represents short term power, for he can live in the court of the king and be a top advisor. But he has no future for he has to be sterilized to serve in the king's court, meaning he cannot have inheritance because he cannot have children. In contrast to the eunuch, the promised Seed appears in the midst of the children of God. On the surface, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom seems to have the real future and opportunity. The people of God have nothing; they are in captivity. Yet, they are a threat unless they can be converted. Here is where the struggle begins.

Hierarchy: The Conflict (1:4-7)

Youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Then the commander of the officials as-

signed new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abed-nego.

The second part of the Biblical covenant has to do with hierarchy. Normally, a discussion of the structure or re-structuring of the kingdom is presented, as in the case of the second part of Deuteronomy (1 :5ff.). This is also the situation in the second part of Daniel one. The text explains how Daniel and friends are renamed, or adopted into Nebuchadnezzar's household. It explains, therefore, how the house of Nebuchadnezzar is re-structured, clarifying the conflict about to begin.

Nebuchadnezzar attempted to bring the people of God under his authority through covenantal means. He was a shrewd man. He had not gotten to his position of power by not being cunning. He possessed all of the qualities Satan desired, just as had the serpent in the garden. He tried to bring the young believers under the Babylonian religion by means of his communion (table), education, and occupation.

First, Nebuchadnezzar led them to his table to eat his special food. In his world, remember, he was a god. To eat with him was to eat with a false god, explaining why the people of God were forbidden to eat Gentile food. The food of the Gentiles not only symbolized them – pigs represented Gentiles – it also stood for the means of fellowship with false gods. God's people were to eat God's food at God's table, the passover where the people ate the lamb with their family and the peace offering where sacrifice was brought to the priest and eaten with the whole family. In the New Testament, Paul tells the Corinthians not to "eat meat offered to idols" (1 Corinthians 10), nor to drink the "cup of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20). He specifically warned not to participate in covenant establishing communion ceremonies (sacraments) to pagan gods. He was not so much concerned with eating the food after it had been put on the market (1 Corinthians 8). He simply did not want the people of the Lord to become part of pagan food ceremonies.

What is often left out in this discussion, however, is what Paul tells the Corinthians to do to stay away from the table of demons: He tells the Corinthians to eat the Holy Communion of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:14-16). He argues for the regular participation in the Lord's Supper to protect the Church from the table of demons. Here is a profound spiritual reality. Good food drives a person away from bad food. Just as a person who is used to good food becomes dissatisfied with the bad, so ~~the people~~ of God are taught the reality of this lesson as they regularly come to communion; I believe weekly.

This truth is not hard to appreciate. Regular communion, if not sewed in a circus atmosphere or not observed as a rushed, weird appendage to the Sunday Morning service, provokes regular self-examination before God. This is the first step in self-government. This is also the first step in coming or returning to God. But more than this, regular communion forces a person to experience the greatest object lesson of the Cross that God has provided. Even if taken in unbelief, the communicant experiences a meal with God that symbolizes and spiritually applies the Death of Christ; if eaten in unbelief, the death is applied physically (1 Corinthians 11 :30); if eaten in faith, the death of Christ is appropriated anew, and the communicant dies again to the old man of flesh. The long term effect according to Paul, however, is that good food drives a person away from the bad, the table of demons.

Daniel proves the point. He will overcome the food of Nebuchadnezzar with the food of the Lord. He will literally not eat what the king offers. He will only eat what belongs

to the Lord. Good food, God's food, will defeat the Devil's food. For this reason, the heart of the battle for the souls of God's children began at the table.

Second, Nebuchadnezzar uses education to convert the youth group. He calls for the complete re-education of the Jewish youth. He wants them to learn "literature," which includes all the writings of the pagan world, as well as the "language" of the unbelievers (1 :4). He calls for complete indoctrination in the Chaldean world and life view. He knows that this must happen for them to begin to think like Babylonians and not like Hebrews. But, the Hebrew youth were so strongly trained in their own schools that the new educational program failed. That is, it was not able to convert them, but it served God's purpose for they took this information and later used their Babylonian training when they became leaders. They knew how to take over the Babylonian mind. Yet, it should be remembered that they could only do this after they had been thoroughly prepared in their own Hebrew schools.

Third, Nebuchadnezzar used career opportunity to convert the youth. He renamed them (1:7), which meant he adopted them into his royal family. He gave them Babylonian names of royalty. He set them up for life on his terms. He literally offered them the world, for Babylon controlled the whole world.

The children of God had been well-trained. They resisted. They did not break. They didn't even bend. They used wisdom to defeat Nebuchadnezzar.

Ethics: Wisdom (1:8-13)

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials. . .

The third aspect of the Biblical covenant always involves ethical stipulations. In Daniel, however, wisdom is prominent. What does wisdom have to do with ethical stipulations? Wisdom is the ability to think and apply God's law (Proverbs 1:1 -7; 2:1ff.). Biblical Wisdom is ethical, not intellectual, magical, or anything else other than that which concerns the application of the Word of God. Thus, when the theme of wisdom appears, the ethical feature of the third part of the Biblical covenant is in view.

Daniel and his friends solve pagan conflicts with wisdom. For example, Daniel in the first chapter uses wisdom to arrive at the mean's for opposing the king's attempt to force him into covenant, the king's table. After he devised the plan and made food the issue, he was given "favor" by the highest member of the king's court. We should keep in mind, however, that wisdom comes from the Spirit even in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 34:9). Food that ratifies God's covenant fills us with the Spirit when eaten in faith (1 Corinthians 12:13). And the Spirit graces man with fruit to have favor (Galatians 5). Yet, in a graphic way, food is at the center of Daniel's experience of wisdom, just as it becomes such in the New Covenant where God's food is at the heart of the conflict as well as the primary means of filling in the book of Acts. Note how the book begins at Pentecost, a great feast where the Spirit is poured out, and how the book progresses in terms of the food scenes, even concluding after a trip on a food boat to Rome, which was about to receive new food, Christ. Thus, food is at the center of the Spirit-filled plan of wisdom.

Daniel took a special vow of holy war (1:8), a Nazirite vow, a vow of fasting to be strengthened by the Lord to do His fighting. In this way, he became a new Samson. Since food is the means for sealing vows, as witnessed

in meals after business deals and weddings, Daniel pledged not to eat the king's food or drink his wine. He could not eat false sacramental food, because that meant sealing a rival covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. He had to prove to the king that the true King would provide through the seal of His covenant food better than all that the world could provide. He ate God's seeds, the literal translation for "vegetables" (1 :16). These seeds were kosher lintels from the Promised Land. They were not corrupted by the soil of Babylon. They had been sanctified by the covenant ground of Israel. They were the sacramental food of his covenant.

Daniel needed more than food, he needed wisdom, the insight that only the Word of God can give. He required Word and Sacrament. He had to eat God's food, but it was wisdom that provided the plan, as well as an inside man to pull off his plan. He was provided with "favor," literally grace, in the eyes of the top official of the king, the eunuch, Aehpenaz. The man with no future aligned himself with the Seed, providing him with a true inheritance. He was the inside man necessary to accomplish the plan. He had to agree with Daniel's plan, disobey the king, and trust that it would work. If he failed, he would certainly be put to death. Like Rahab and all the other Godly inside-people – this principle also works for the other side, for the apostate is always the inside man (Judas, etc.) who causes the downfall – the eunuch trusted in the wisdom of Daniel. He entered a higher court, the court of the Lord, reminding us of another Ethiopian Eunuch who believed the servant of the Lord, Deacon Philip, on the way back to his country (Acts 8).

Oath: The Test (1:14-16)

So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. And at the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables (seeds).

The fourth aspect of the Biblical covenant involves an oath and/or vow (Deuteronomy 27-30). In Daniel's case, he kept a vow. But often, some sort of test is placed with the vow or oath to determine the level of faithfulness on the part of the one to whom the vow is made, in this instance God, and the level of commitment on the part of the one who made the vow or oath, Daniel. The results of the test are measured in terms of positive and negative sanctions.

Actually, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar were both put to the test; they were sanctioned, except Nebuchadnezzar did not probably know at this point what Ashpenaz had done. Nevertheless a test was occurring right under his nose. The test was, "Whose food would prevail?" The test lasted ten days. At the end, God's food restored the Hebrew youth; they were symbolically renewed in the covenant with God and strengthened. They showed Nebuchadnezzar that it was better to renew their covenant through the Lord's

food than to enter a rival covenant with the king's food. Better to have a little with God than a lot without Him. The youth looked better, proving that God's sanction of blessing was on them.

Succession: The Transfer (1:17-21)

And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. . . . Then at the end of the days which the king had specified, . . . they entered the king's personal service. And as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all of the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

The final piece of the Biblical covenant is succession, the transfer of inheritance. Normally, the head of the covenant hands down the blessing of God, which is the ultimate inheritance because it involved land, seed, and the blessings of the covenant. During Daniel's time, the human-representative-head-of-the-covenant, the Davidic king, had died. Ironically, Nebuchadnezzar, as conqueror of the Davidic king, becomes the replacement head of the covenant, explaining why he receives the sanctions of the Biblical covenant for faithfulness or unfaithfulness.

Finally, the youths were brought before the king. He examined them, when actually he was being judged; he just didn't know it. He found the Hebrew youths to be best suited for service in his court. He discovered that they had been given superior knowledge, even of his own world and life view (1 :17); they understood his beliefs better than he or his magicians did. In so doing, Nebuchadnezzar lost the gates of his city. He had been defeated by another Samson. He and his city had been penetrated by the people of God, when all along he thought he had pulled down the city of God. He learned that the Holy City had only taken up new residence in his own backyard. Truly, the gates of Hell did not prevail.

Nebuchadnezzar set himself up for his own defeat. Neither he nor his magicians were any match for Daniel. He was even out-lived by Daniel, as the last verse says, "And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king" (1 :21). The promise of God was with Him, proving the Lord's covenantal faithfulness. As taking the food of God wrongfully ended in death for some, eating faithfully proved to give life to others. The food of the Lord was efficacious, proving to be a means of sustenance and "favor," grace! Most of all, Daniel appears at this early stage in the book to be the inheritor of not only the promises of God, but everything that belongs to Nebuchadnezzar. But then, was not the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant that he would be a "father of many nations" (Genesis 15)? Yes, and so we begin to see this aspect of the Abrahamic covenant be worked out! A son of Abraham begins the process of inheriting a Gentile kingdom. Of course, this process will not be ultimately worked out until the ultimate Son of Abraham, Jesus Christ, comes in history!