

Daniel and the King's Meat

The record in 2 Kings 20 describes a prophecy of Isaiah to king Hezekiah:

“Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith Yahweh. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (2 Kings 20:17-18).

The fulfilment of this prophecy brings us to consider Daniel and his three friends, who were taken to be eunuchs in the king's court. The prophecy of Daniel commences with a description of how certain captive princes of Israel were brought to Babylon in order to be taught “the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans” (Dan. 1:4). They were to be taught the wisdom of the then known world.

Speaking of the wisdom of Babylon, Isaiah wrote: “... thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee” (Isa. 47:10), and the wisdom of our age is no different. Professing themselves to be wise, men embrace folly, and so become fools (Rom. 1:22). The wisdom of men is foolishness with God (1 Cor. 3:19) and cannot save from death. As it is written:

“after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

And again:

“we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7-8).

One of the themes of Daniel chapter 2 describes how a particular secret thing was made known by Israel's God – the dream that Nebuchadnezzar was given, speaking of days yet future. The wisest men of Babylon did not know, and could not reveal the nature, or significance of his dream – yet the prophet of God could.

The exiled princes were granted the privilege of being granted to eat the same food and drink as the king himself:

“... And the king appointed them a daily provision of **the king's meat, and of the wine** which he drank, so nourishing them three years that at the end thereof they might stand before the king” (Dan. 1:5).

Daniel, however, refused to eat the king's meat, or drink the king's wine:

“Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of **the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank**: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself” (Dan. 1:8).

The question arises therefore, Why did Daniel consider the king's food and drink to be defiling, and to be abstained from? An explanation is often advanced, that the meat would be sacrificed and offered to Idols, and that therefore he could not in all good conscience partake of it. That may well have been the case. Hosea describes how that "they shall eat unclean things in Assyria" (Hos. 9:3), and Ezekiel that "they shall eat defiled bread" (Ezek. 4:13) - but the Daniel record does not make that point. The old English word "meat" does not just signify animal flesh as in our day, but food of any sort, which would not necessarily be offered to idols like animals would. Moreover, it was not just the king's food that they were offered, but his wine also: "... the wine which he drank" which also would not have been part of a sacrifice to idols. There would therefore appear to be more involved than simply the meat being offered to Idols.

The point that is made in the record is that Nebuchadnezzar "appointed them a daily provision of **the king's meat**, and of the wine which he drank" (Dan. 1:5). This expression "the king's meat" seems to be important, as it is used 4 times in this chapter (vs. 5, 8, 13, 15). The emphasis of Scripture therefore, is that the food and drink was that food which the king himself partook of. We would suggest that this is the reason why Daniel, a captive prince of Israel refused to partake of it.

Proverbs 22 describes a situation pertaining to the royal dainties of the king's court:

"when thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties: for they are deceitful meat." (Prov. 22:1-3).

Daniel was not desirous of the Babylonian ruler's dainties, and refused to partake of them. Again, Psalm 141 continues in the same vein:

"Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of **their dainties**" (Psa. 141:4).

Again, we are reminded of how Daniel would not eat of the dainties of the Babylonian king who worked iniquity in his idolatrous worship and immoral practices. He did not desire the pleasures of Babylon, and would not partake of it's royal food and drink.

Hebrews chapter 11 speaks of Moses who would not "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25), and it would appear that this was the spirit of Daniel. Again, Nehemiah did not "of the bread of the governor" (Neh. 5:14), choosing rather to identify himself with his people, the returning exiles. It would seem that this again was the spirit of Daniel: - when his people were eating the bread and drinking the water of affliction (Isa. 30:20), he could not bring himself to eat the food from the king's table.

By contrast, we read of how the king of Babylon exalted the former king of Judah, Jehoiachin. He:

"brought him forth out of prison, and spake kindly unto him, and set his throne above the thrones of the kings that were with him in Babylon, and changed his prison garments: and he did continually eat bread before him all the days of his life. And for his diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, all the days of his life" (Jer. 32:31-34).

The book of Revelation again brings our attention to the wine and food of Babylon. Revelation 17 describes how men became intoxicated by the Babylonish wine. So the Angel said to John:

“Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with **the wine** of her fornication” (Rev. 17:1-2).

Again, chapter 18 describes how that the nations delighted in the culinary dainties of Babylon:

“For all nations have drunk of the **wine** of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of **her delicacies**” (Rev. 18:3).

The wine and meat of Babylon then, is something to be avoided at all costs. We do not wish to become intoxicated with the errors of the apostasy, or be led astray by the delights of her delicacies. Like Daniel therefore, we must eschew the riches and pleasures of the Babylonian system, and identify ourselves with those who were afflicted by her: the faithful minority. By refusing to eat of the Babylonian king’s meat and drink, we will not be made drunk by her teachings, or be filled with her falsehoods. The example of Daniel therefore is something for us to emulate, so that we, like he, will remain faithful to Yahweh in a day of adversity.

The faithful four in Babylon chose a simpler, more basic diet: not rich food and wine, but “pulse to eat and water to drink” (Dan. 2:12). Isaiah again spoke “the bread of adversity and water of affliction” that the exiled nation would partake of (Isa. 30:20), and Daniel identified himself with such, as described above. It is also written of the faithful:

“Ye shall serve Yahweh your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee” (Deut. 23:25).

We see a fulfilment of this principle in the example of Daniel and his friends of like precious faith:

“at the end of ten days, their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat. Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse” (Dan. 2:15-16).

Abstaining from the Babylonian dainties, these men would not enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. And they delighted in the revealed Wisdom of God, rather than the folly of men’s wisdom.

Interestingly, Psalm 119 describes a similar situation:

“... Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than my enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation ... how sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:97-104).

Notice how that here, the partaking of Divine Wisdom is likened to eating a diet. So Jeremiah declared: "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16). And again, the Psalmist:

"the judgements of Yahweh are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb . Moreoever by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward" (Psa. 19:7-11).

We must therefore give attention to our spiritual diet. We must "taste and see that Yahweh is good" (Psa. 34:8). Abstaining from the gluttony and intoxicating influences of Babylon we desire to be nourished only by the revealed Word, which remains unknown to the wisest men of human understanding. We must heed the example of Daniel, and remain separate from the ways of sin, so that when the destruction thereof comes, we shall be spared in the day of wrath.

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