

Hurst Green
13th May 2018
Daniel Chapter 1
Time to be Holy

So for a few weeks we are going to be taking a look at Daniel – a book that encourages some and confuses others and I hope I will show you the way to encouragement in all of this because that is what this book is about.

Too many try and read it as a history book and that causes them problems because it is here in the midst of the prophetic books but equally it is not simply a prophetic book as it is rooted in a particular time in history.

But that is true for many of the prophetic books of the bible. The prophet has words for the people of that time as well as words that echoes down the centuries to teach and encourage us.

So first let's place Daniel in History.

Israel (and Judah) have been ignoring God – they did not heed his ways. This has been true from the time of deliverance out of Egypt through to now and they are about to reap the fruits of their disobedience.

God had sent prophets to warn them, to call them and when things went pear shaped you find them quickly remembering who God is. The only thing they do more quickly is to forget afterwards.

They had had their judges and had their King they told God they wanted. God had warned them but they had ignored that and had reaped exactly what God had warned them. High taxes, forced labour, Kings focussed on themselves – most of the kings did evil in the sight of God and most of the people willingly followed the King.

But in all of that God had maintained a remnant – a small group of people who stayed faithful to God.

But now judgement is too fall – the nation of Israel is being sent into exile for seventy years and God had prophets warning the people and encouraging them to settle into the exile. Jeremiah is one of those and he has this advice

Jeremiah 29:4-7 (ANIV)

⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶ Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷ Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

The date is 605 BC and remember that the route into exile was not a mass migration but took place over a number of years.

Daniel was obviously one of the first. Nebuchadnezzar seized some of the finest young men; scholars as it says in verse 4

Daniel 1:4 (ANIV)

⁴ *young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.*

He was assimilating them into his empire – they were to learn about it and its ways and cultures so that they could be part of his government.

Daniel and his friends who crop up throughout this book; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It is interesting that we know Daniel by his Israelite name but we are more familiar with his friends by their Babylonian names.

So Daniel goes into exile and yet we know that he will also see the end of the seventy years. In verse 4 he is described as a young man and so probably is in his late teens and will be nearly ninety by the end of the story.

A story of great miracles and wonders as these four young men stay faithful to their God in a strange culture and that is why this book is of relevance and help to us today.

We stand as Christians in a strange and alien culture – we are not called to the royal court but we have to stand as Christians and to be prepared to be seen as different just as Daniel and his friends decided to be different.

We are not told how many were chosen for this royal academy but we are only told of these four who dared to be different. To be different before the nations.

Surely this has to be a major part of our witness, our testimony as we stand in the land into which God has sent us; as we stand in the market place before the nations we need to be different.

We are Holy because the Lord our God is Holy.

That Holiness shines forth in our love one for another – in how we act and interact as a fellowship.

And here Daniel makes his stand – not to be defiled by the rich food and wine of the Kings table.

Now most prisoners would have leapt at this – they could be on gruel and water and now they are given the chance to eat of the best in the land.

They could even explain it away as keeping up their strength so that they could be ready for whatever.

However Daniel sees this differently but note how respectful he is in this. He doesn't just say "No". He politely asks if he might have vegetables and water instead.

He stands out but does so respectfully.

When the Guard was worried (as well he might be) Daniel offers him a way out – a ten day trial.

Daniel is trusting in God that his vegetarian option will show up as better than the Kings option and that is just what happens.

So how does that happen in our lives? Are there places or ways that we should be living more simple lives so that we are different from the society around us.

This has a particular call on Christians in the first world – that’s us by the way – were we live in a society that is rich and getting ever richer.

We may look at the rich in our society and say that we are not rich like them but as I continually remind you we are richer than most of the world.

If you have any doubts walk into any supermarket:

- How many varieties of chopped tomatoes do we need?
- Do we need all fruits to be available all year round?
- How many aisles of food do we need?

I could go on but you can see how we have great wealth – even compared to our parents’ generation. For those in the UK:

- Mangoes and many other things were unknown
- Fruit and Veg was seasonal
- Spring greens were a treat because the new season was coming (we don’t even eat them now)
- Grapes were a treat for when you were sick.

And again I could go on – we have wealth that much of the world finds unimaginable

Are we eating of the Kings rich food when we are being called to be something different – this will be a message that comes back throughout this book in different forms.

So let us look at Daniel Chapter 1

The first lesson is a simple one that many find very hard to grasp **The Lord God is sovereign.**

We all nod our heads at that and would agree with it as we live in our comfort.

For those being carried into exile they see a different point of view. They have lost everything – they were wealthy and well respected in society and now they are little more than slaves.

But they had been warned.

The first two verses of this chapters proclaims God’s sovereignty

Daniel 1:1-2 (ANIV)

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

The Lord could have defended Jerusalem and see off Nebuchadnezzar and if you have any doubt of that read any of the battles in Exodus, Judges or Kings and see God seeing off his enemies.

But not this time – the Lord delivers. This is part of God’s master plan for the exiles and so Israel must taste defeat.

If you read the other prophets you find them being told not to fight – just surrender; go along with God’s will but they choose to fight and get defeated!! Man at work.

Way back in Deuteronomy Ch. 28 we find God promising that if Israel went astray he would send them into exile and now one thousand years later we find them being sent.

God is consistent and sovereign

The second lesson is a more subtle one and it is **to watch out for worldliness.**

The King took these young men out of their culture and did a number of things:

- He taught them his language
- He taught them his literature
- He gave them new names

What he is trying to do is to replace the culture of Israel with the culture of Babylon

And this happens in our worldly society

People try and replace the culture of God with the culture of the world.

I have often said of teenagers there are three main danger points when they can wander away from Christianity

The first is becoming a teenager when the world around them seems to have so much more for them to do and this is why youth work in the Church is so important to help them and their parents through this period by showing them how relevant our faith is.

We each have a role in this as we model our faith making a difference and being something special.

The second is heading off to University when they experience a complete change in almost everything around them.

And the third is when they finish training and go off to work when again it can be in a different place and so everything changes.

Now those are sweeping generalisations but every time change occurs in life there is a danger of people falling by the way side.

The third lesson is that **we must resist worldliness**

Like Daniel we must resolve to be Holy and accept that this may mean that we have to be different.

However like Daniel we must do this with humility.

We are not likely to be in Daniel’s position with food but if we are going to be different we are going to be noticed and it is here that Daniel has this lesson for us.

As people approach and ask we need to avoid the “we are right and you are wrong” judgemental approach.

As Daniel did we need to let them see the difference and realise God’s way is a better way.

And the fourth lesson is an important one – **God honours faithfulness**

In verses 17 to 21 we see God honouring faithfulness as God moves these four young men into positions of power.

Now God may not honour us with positions of power in our land but he will honour us with positions of power in his land – if we are faithful.

But to be faithful we must first find out what God wants us to be faithful with – too often our dishonesty here stops us in our tracks because we find nothing and so we carry on merging with the world until no one can tell the difference and so no one is interested in the difference.

So your question for today is how should you be standing out?

Where is it you should be eating vegetables?

God is calling – where are you not listening?