



HG7: Daniel (1/5) 'Dare To Be A Daniel'

Daniel 1:1-21

Home Group Sermon Notes

11th January 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

Today we start our new home group series of studies based on the book of Daniel. Daniel is better known as a children's story about a young man who goes into a lion's den and lives to tell the tale....who has 3 friends with funny sounding names like my shack your shack and a bungalow and who all get caught up in a fiery furnace. But Daniel is more than a children's story because the book is not really about Daniel its all about God, and that despite present appearances, God is in control. The main character in the book of Daniel is God himself and how He works. Daniel is the story of faith in exile. Following the loss of the Jewish land, throne and temple Daniel offers a message of hope as he discovers that it is possible to maintain a strong faith when faced with oppression and assimilation. For a Jew it was crucial to live in God's country but now following the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar their dreams have been shattered and in the journey from Jerusalem to Babylon they have lost confidence and hope. They no doubt ask the questions, was Yahweh, the One true God in control and supreme after all.... has Israel lost power ..or has in fact the God of Israel lost power? Does Daniel have any value for us today? Kenneth Leech says "*As Christians enter the twenty first century they do so in exile, strangers and pilgrims, aliens in a strange land. They will need to learn the strategies of survival, and to sing the songs of Zion in the midst of Babylon.*" We live in a pluralistic and secular society that has exiled itself from God, withdrawn from his presence and protection. People all around us follow other gods, how do we as Christians stand firm in our faith and what might "daring to be a Daniel" mean in 21 century life? Can we relate his experiences to the world of work, family and public service?

Daniel the book: Daniel is a book of 2 halves, the first half is a history of events that took place and which show us that God is at work in the world, the second half is apocalyptic, like the book of Revelation or parts of Ezekiel, full of wild images and metaphors and as Daniel himself sometimes found them hard to understand we'll be leaving that part of Daniel to Paul to explain to us.

Themes: There are 4 main themes in the book of Daniel

- ⇒ The sovereignty of God - God is all knowing and in charge of world events despite how things may look
- ⇒ Having purpose in life - Daniel and his friends serve God regardless of external pressures and consequences
- ⇒ Perseverance - Daniel lived in a hostile land for 70 years but he still served God
- ⇒ God's faithfulness - God was faithful to Daniel throughout his life and delivered him from many dangerous situations

When: Although there are different opinions as to when the book of Daniel was written the story happened approx 600 years BC, some thought it was written at the time of the story, which is what I am assuming for the purposes of this study, others think it was written during the Maccabean period about 200BC and others still think that because the prophesies were so accurate the book must have been written after the events.

In the "right" place at the right time, vs1-7: There were 3 major invasions of Palestine by the powerful dictator Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. Following each raid the victors would take the cream of society and take them back to Babylon and introduce them to a completely new culture. It's around 605BC and Daniel and his friends were in the first group of exiles to be taken from Jerusalem to Babylon. Daniel could never have expected that he would end up in Babylon, he was a young man, about 16yrs old, with all the kind of dreams that a young man his age and status would have had, he would have been looking forward to a good education, good job, marriage and raise a family... his whole life was in front of him. He was devoted to God and hopefully he would go on to do great things for Him and the community...but life did not turn out the way he'd hoped. Verses 3-4. tell us that Daniel is from a good family, he is physically flawless... he was good looking. He's clever and therefore he was a perfect candidate for serving in the king's palace.

Invasion and conquest were bad enough but there was far deeper heartbreak. God had made a promise a long time ago to Abraham, he said, "I'll be your God, and your people will be my people. And I will give you a promised land, and I will make you a new community that will bless the world." For centuries that promise had sustained the people of Israel, sometimes its all they had. They had endured captivity in Egypt, then realised the dream when they entered the Promised Land only to live through a long slow decline as the kingdom became divided until all that was left was the small southern kingdom called Judah. Now with the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar the dream is finally shattered. The nation is defeated, the temple contents taken and placed in a pagan temple and Daniel and the nations best would spend their lives serving an alien king.

Daniel had lost everything, his culture his family and the life that he loved. He had to quickly learn a foreign language and suddenly he is a foreigner in a strange land with no prospects of ever going home... as if this was not enough he and his 3 friends were renamed to honour Babylonian gods. To have new names forced on them was a highly manipulative and controlling act. It shows the king's domination over them, its like he is saying, "you belong to me now, I am your king," this was particularly difficult for Jews whose whole identity was wrapped up in their name. To a Jew his name is very significant. Daniel means "God is my judge" but it was changed to **Belteshazzar**, (a servant of Bel). The Babylonians thought that they were unbeatable but Daniel's name reminds us that even though they were an awesome force, God was the judge and even today political might and muscle is nothing compared to God, the judge and ruler of the earth. Daniels 3 friends were

- ⇒ **Hananiah** (meaning the Lord is gracious), his name was changed to - **Shadrach** (inspired by the sun god)
- ⇒ **Mishael** (means who is what God is?) but was changed to **Meshach** (who is what the moon god is?)
- ⇒ **Azariah** (the Lord helps) and changed to - **Abed-Nego** (servant of Nebo)

How would these young men respond? Would they give in to the temptations placed before them or would they submit, excusing themselves due to youth and inexperience? How would you have reacted if you were in their place? Nebuchadnezzar had put in place a programme of assimilation rather than oppression, he wanted to win the hearts and minds of Daniel and his friends, they were to be fed the very best food from the royal kitchen, taught the language, all about the Babylonian culture and literature and trained over a 3 year period in preparation for work at the royal court.... a bit like an early finishing school for young men. Nebuchadnezzar's aim was to win them over to the Babylonian way of life and then through them influence other Jews.

A high carb diet, vs8-16: Daniel had had to learn to compromise on certain matters in order to survive yet still maintain his personal integrity and faith but there came a time when enough was enough, v 8 says that “Daniel resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine”. Resolve means “he purposed in his heart with determination” The food issue was the line that Daniel was not prepared to cross. The Babylonians were obviously advocates of the Atkins diet, high in protein but not one that Daniel and his friends favoured and so this is where Daniel chose to make his stand. Now up to this point Nebuchadnezzar had been calling the shots, he had decided to conquer Israel, he had decided to take the sacred objects and best young people back to Babylon, he had placed them in educational programmes designed to make them leave behind their old lives, he’d decreed that they have new names and be fed certain food.... it didn’t seem to be such a bad life so the easiest thing in the world for Daniel and his young friends to do would have been to accept that they had no choice and just become completely passive about everything, but Daniel takes a stand. It’s not clear why this was so important, but he must have felt that by eating the food and wine he would be defiled and God dishonoured. We need to know how much courage this took on Daniel’s part. Nebuchadnezzar was not the kind of leader to negotiate.

V 9 says that “God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel” God had caused the official to show favour towards Daniel, it wasn’t just a bit of luck, God was involved and he had decided to use this official. Whatever Nebuchadnezzar thought of himself, God is in charge, He controls the destiny of the universe, Daniel’s resolve was backed up by God’s resources and power. When we decide to stand firm on an issue for Jesus, we are not just doing it in our own strength we have behind us the power of God. We all have lines that were are not prepared to cross at work, school home and so on, perhaps one famous example of someone not crossing a line was the stand taken by Eric Liddell the famous Scottish athlete. During the summer of 1924, the Olympics were hosted by the city of Paris. Liddell was a committed Christian (he knew that God had made him fast and he wanted to honour him with his speed) but he refused to run on Sunday (the Sabbath), with the consequence that he was forced to withdraw from the 100 metres race, his best event. The schedule had been published several months earlier, and his decision was made well before the Games began. Liddell spent the intervening months training for the 400 metres, an event in which he had previously excelled. Even so, his success in the 400m was largely unexpected. The day of 400 metres race came, and as Liddell went to the starting blocks, an American masseur slipped a piece of paper into Liddell’s hand with a quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30, “Those who honour me I will honour.” Liddell ran with that piece of paper in his hand. He not only won the race, but broke the existing world record with a time of 47.6 seconds. (*Wikipedia*). Although he came under enormous pressure Eric had resolved not to defile himself nor to dishonour God so he took the difficult decision to stand firm, to stand alone and to dare to be different.

Daring to be different, vs17-21: The official agrees to a 10 day trial of living on a vegetarian diet, at the end of the 10 days the 4 friends were healthier and better nourished than those who had been on the rich food diet so out went the fancy food and it was vegetables from then on. Daniel stood firm and drew on God’s resources, and as a result when the king met the 4 young men he found out that they were the very best out of all the young men in captivity. No one impressed him as much as Daniel and his friends and as a result they were appointed to his staff of advisors. It’s interesting, it’s as if Daniel and the friends had completed a test, they had denied themselves the rich food in order to remain different, to stand apart and to vindicate God and because of their stand God poured out the blessings on them, they were the healthiest out of all the others, they remained united and strong, God gave them knowledge, unusual aptitude for learning the literature and science and he gave Daniel supernatural gifts to interpret dreams and the meanings of visions. God had a plan!! Viv Thomas says, “*God’s people were called to live in Babylon in a context dominated by superstition, omens and fear. Daniel and his Hebrew friends responded to this by embracing Babylon in every way possible, consistent with their responsibility to God. They chose to live their faith and yet be integrated into the heavily contaminated world of Babylon. So in the embrace of their second choice world they affirmed that it was not Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar or Darius who was in control, but God.*”

God is in control:

- ⇒ Daniel 1:2. “And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.”
- ⇒ Daniel 1:9. “Now God had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to Daniel”
- ⇒ Daniel 1:17. “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.”

We can see from these verses that the book’s author is convinced that God is at work right from the start. There’s a reason for what is happening. Despite how things look, the invasion of the Babylonians, the sacking of the temple, these things are not just random acts, God has not abandoned his people and he has not broken his promise or forgotten the plans he has for them. In amongst all the suffering God was up to something in Babylon. Whatever you suffer today or tomorrow or sometime in the future, God is with you.

For us today: Through the second half of the 20th century the religious landscape of Europe changed dramatically. Social commentators explain the change by describing the shift from a Christendom society to a post Christendom society. The Christian faith that once dominated European society, beliefs politics and laws, is now almost a distant memory. Robert Jenson says “*Western civilisation is still defined by Christianity but as a civilisation that used to be Christian*” and Callum Brown says that “*It took several centuries to convert Britain to Christianity but it has taken less than 40 years to forsake it.*” In scripture exile is symbolised in contrasting the 2 cities Jerusalem and Babylon, the city we long for and the city where we must live.

Jerusalem is a city:

- ⇒ where God is publicly honoured and where we long to live
- ⇒ where God is openly and publicly worshipped
- ⇒ where the courts pass laws in keeping with God’s laws
- ⇒ where the people we live among also know and worship God
- ⇒ where faith in Christ is taught in schools
- ⇒ where public holidays are opportunities for the country to express its faith, (where Christmas truly is all about the birth of Christ)

Babylon is a city:

- ⇒ where we have to live
- ⇒ where our faith is a personal and private thing
- ⇒ where the courts rulings are not in keeping with God’s laws
- ⇒ where the people we live among have very different faith or no faith at all
- ⇒ where Christianity is only one of many faiths taught in school
- ⇒ where Christmas is just another excuse for a holiday

Although the book of Daniel presents us with the negative experience of exile we should be careful not to see exile overall as a negative experience because at the heart of Daniel is that although Nebuchadnezzar invaded Israel it was God himself who allowed it to happen, it was God who handed his people over to Babylon in response to their sin but his long term plan was to lead them to a place of repentance and not judgement. Where is God leading us as a nation.... where is God leading us as a church.... is God withholding gifts and blessings whilst we limit our commitment to him. Is there a test for us to undertake, is there a stand that we need to make.... is there a time for us to dare to be different and to dare to be a Daniel.



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Home Group Sermon Sheet

11th January 2009 - Pauline Woolnough

COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

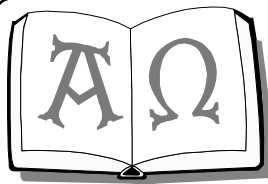
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)

What New Years resolution have you made that you are determined to keep above all others, and why?



Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1: Surely, it would have been much easier for Daniel and his friends to accept their situation, they could have used their youth and lack of experience as their excuse. Think of times when you have found it easier to blend in than to stand out and make a stand for Christ.

2: Where do you draw the line, in what ways would your friends and colleagues see you as being different and "daring to be a Daniel"

3: How far should Christians set out to be different from those around them and how far strive to be like everyone else so that they are not perceived as odd.

4: Is there any evidence that God is in control of today's world?

5: Do we have the right to impose what we see as God's way of life on other people, can you think of any examples?

6: Does the church do enough to change the culture of the place we live in, what more can we do?

7: Why do predominately Christian nations led by Christian men and women not change the world for the better.

8: Daniel and his friends passed the "food test" Where is God challenging or testing us as a church? Do you think that he could be withholding blessings and gifts? Where do we need to strengthen our resolve, is it our prayer life, is it our worship, is it our outreach? Does Daniel challenge our level of commitment?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

