

Reformation Fellowship Notes • May 3, 2020
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Handout #3
Daniel 1

I. Introduction

- A. The first chapter is a unit.
 - 1. Verse 21 marks it as such.
 - a) It introduces the book.
 - b) But it is somewhat separate from the book.
 - 2. It is written in Hebrew.
 - a) The chapter is primarily directed to a Jewish audience.
 - 3. It helps us to see who Daniel was, how he got his position, and what kind of person he was.
 - a) It serves as an introduction to the book.
 - b) The rest of the book tells us about events and divine revelations that came to Daniel while he served in the court.

II. Daniel 1:1-2

Dan. 1:1 In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar and placed the vessels in the treasury of his gods.

- A. Daniel was taken to Babylon in the first deportation (605 BC)
 - 1. The deportation was during in the third year of King Jehoiakim (608-598).
 - a) Jehoiakim was the son of Josiah.
 - (1) Josiah reigned from 640-609 BC.
 - (a) He was a very good king.
 - (i) Deuteronomy was found during his reign.
 - (ii) He carried out extensive reforms.
 - (iii) They celebrated the Passover for the first time in the land (more about this later).
 - (b) He was killed fighting against the Egyptians.
 - b) Jehoiakim was not a good king.
 - 2. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem.
 - a) The siege was after the battle of Carchemish (605 BC).
 - b) We have no other record of a siege of Jerusalem at this time.
 - (1) But we know that Nebuchadnezzar was active in the area.
 - (2) The siege must have been short.
 - (3) But it brought Jerusalem to its knees.
 - 3. God gave Jehoiakim and the vessels into Nebuchadnezzar's hand.

- a) God is in control of what is happening.
 - b) Jehoiakim (608-598) was made a Babylonian vassal.
 - (1) He was originally made king by the Egyptians as a puppet king in 609.
 - (2) Now he was forced to serve Babylon.
4. Nebuchadnezzar took some of the vessels from the temple.
- a) He took them to Shinar.
 - (1) I talked about this last week.
 - b) He placed them in the temple of his god (Marduk).
 - (1) He was demonstrating Marduk's superiority.
 - c) These vessels are very important.
 - (1) They are mentioned twice in Daniel 1:2.
 - (2) They show up in Daniel 5:2.
 - (a) Story of Belshazar
 - (3) Ezra 1:7
 - (a) The vessels are specifically mentioned as something that returned with the first group of returnees.
 - (4) The vessels were a symbol of the captivity of Judah.
 - (a) They were in Babylon for 72 years (605-537 BC).
5. The text does not make explicit that Daniel and his friends were taken at this time.
- a) But this is the clear implication.
 - b) This is the fulfillment of a prophecy.

Not long after an Assyrian chief of staff went to Jerusalem, Isaiah told Hezekiah that his own sons would end up as eunuchs/members of the palace staff in Babylon (Isa. 36:2; 39:5-7), and that prophecy is now fulfilled. (Goldingay, p. 164-5)

III. What this does to the mind of the people of Judah

- A. Huge shock—I don't know if we can fully appreciate this.
 - 1. Over a period of 18 years, Judah was completely dismantled.
 - a) There were three waves of deportations.
 - (1) Tens of thousands of people were taken to Babylon.
 - (a) Estimates vary between 20,000 and 60,000.
 - b) Temple vessels were taken.
 - c) Temple was destroyed.
- B. How the ANE would have understood the Babylonian rise to power
 - 1. Events on earth reflect realities in the heavenlies.
 - a) When one kingdom militarily defeated another kingdom, this meant that the first kingdom's god was stronger than the god of the defeated kingdom.
 - 2. So the conquest of Judah suggested that the god of Babylon (Marduk) was more powerful than YHWH.
 - a) YHWH was unable to protect Judah,
 - (1) YHWH couldn't protect the people of Judah,
 - (2) YHWH couldn't protect his temple and the holy vessels.

- b) YHWH had warned through his prophets of this disaster coming.
 - (1) But the concept of a god allowing his people to be punished through the conquest of another kingdom was foreign.
 - (2) False prophets in Judah said that YHWH would not allow Judah to be conquered.
 - c) Influenced by the perspective of the ANE, this event looked like a total defeat of YHWH.
 - (1) This had to cause even the most faithful in Judah to wonder what this meant for YHWH and Judah.
 - (2) This had to have an impact on Daniel and his friends.
- C. This situation had to have raise a number of new and critical questions.
1. Is YHWH really the one, true God?
 2. Is he still committed to his people?
 3. Is God still with us?
 4. Does he still listen to us?
 5. How do we serve God now?
 - a) Later, what do we do now that we can't make sacrifices to YHWH?

IV. Daniel 1:3-7

Dan. 1:3 Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court. ⁶Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. ⁷The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

- A. Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ashpenaz to select and educate young Judean men.
1. He was overseer of officials and king's harem.
 2. This was apparently an ongoing program.
 - a) Talented young men were selected to be trained for state service.
 - (1) From noble families
 - b) Terms used have religious and ethical connotations.
 - c) In Persia we know that education began at age 14 and was completed by 17, and they entered into service of the king. (Delitzsch, p. 73)
 - (1) From this we can assume that Daniel was born about 619 BC.
 - d) Foreigners were apparently selected for this program.
 - (1) In some cultures, in later times, foreigners were preferred for this.
 3. They were trained in the language and literature of Babylon.

- a) Under Nebuchadnezzar, there was a renaissance of culture.
- b) Babylon has a long and glorious history before this time.
 - (1) Going back to Hammurabi (??)
- c) Ashpenaz was told to train them in the literature and language of the Chaldeans.
 - (1) Chaldeans were a subset of Babylonians.

The accumulated literature included omens, magic incantations, prayers and hymns, myths and legends, scientific formulae for skills such as glass-making, mathematics and astrology. (Baldwin, p. 88-9)

- d) Three-year program
 - (1) Preparation for service of the king
 - (2) Broad based education rather than narrow specialization
- 4. Students would be given special food.
 - a) King's choice food
 - b) Wine which king drank
- 5. Four Judeans went through this program.
 - a) Daniel—"God is my judge"
 - b) Hananiah—"Yah has been gracious"
 - c) Mishael—"Who is what God is"
 - d) Azariah—"Yah has helped"
- 6. They were given Chaldean names.
 - a) Belteshazzar—"Bel, protect the king"
 - (1) Bel was the wife of Marduk.
 - b) Shadrach—"I am very fearful of God"
 - c) Meshach—"I am of little account"
 - d) Abed-nego—"Servant of the shining one"

V. Daniel 1:8-13

Dan. 1:8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. ² Now God allowed Daniel to receive favor and compassion from the palace master. ¹⁰ The palace master said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹ Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe."

- A. Daniel resolved that he would not eat the king's food nor drink the wine.
 - 1. The unusual word *pat bag* is thought to be a technical term referring to the king's private stocks.

2. He did not want to defile himself.
 - a) We will talk about this more later.
3. Daniel did not rebel; he is very respectful.
 - a) He sought permission from the chief official (Ashpenaz).
 - (1) The commander was favorably disposed to Daniel.
 - (a) This was an act of God.
 - (i) Like Joseph and Esther
 - (ii) The favor of a foreigner in an otherwise hostile environment.
 - (b) Daniel is generally well-liked by those he serves.
 - (2) Commander was afraid he would anger the king.
 - (1) Daniel might look less healthy.
 - (2) Ashpenaz's life would be at risk.
 - (a) As we see in the next chapter, Nebuchadnezzar was capable of severe punishment.
 - b) So Daniel sought the help of the guard.
 - (1) The guard was appointed by the chief official to oversee the young Judeans.
 - (2) Daniel proposed an experiment.
 - (a) Short period (10 days)
 - (b) Vegetables (apparently no meat)
 - (c) Water (apparently no wine)
 - (d) If we look worse than the others, do as you think best, but if we look not worse, we can continue.
 - (3) Notice that this is not an outright refusal to eat the king's food.
 - (a) Daniel thinks that it would be wrong for him to eat the king's food.
 - (i) He is probably quite confident that it is wrong and that God will honor the test.
 - (b) So he sets up a test accordingly.
 - (i) In order to be able to keep from defilement, Daniel needs God's validating action.
 - (c) Whatever the result of the test, Daniel grants the guard the freedom to do what he thinks best at that point.

VI. Daniel 1:14-17

¹⁴ So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. ¹⁶ So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

A. The overseer agreed to conduct the experiment.

1. Why?
 - a) As any government functionary knows, it is safest to follow the rules.
 - (1) Ashpenaz does not want to take the risk.
 - (2) The guard is willing to take the risk.
 - (a) He may think that Ashpenaz might cover for him.

- b) But this experiment is just for a short time.
 - (1) The guard can call it off if it does not go well.
 - (a) He can call it off before it is discovered.
 - c) But the potential downside is much greater than the potential upside.
 - (1) It was the grace of God that allowed Daniel to have the test period.
2. After ten days, Daniel and his friends seemed better and fatter than the others.
 - a) It was by the grace of God that their appearance improved in ten days.
 3. He continued to give them the alternate diet.

VII. Daniel 1:17-21

¹⁷To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams.¹⁸ At the end of the time that the king had set for them to be brought in, the palace master brought them into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, ¹⁹ and the king spoke with them. And among them all, no one was found to compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they were stationed in the king's court. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. ²¹ And Daniel continued there until the first year of King Cyrus.

- A. The four did very well in their program.
 1. Their achievement was a gift from God.
 2. Daniel was even able to understand visions and dreams.
 3. The king interviewed them to assess their progress.
 - a) The four were the best.
 - b) They entered into the service of the king.
 - c) They were better than the magicians and conjurers.
- B. Daniel served the king until the conquest of the Persians.

VIII. Why didn't Daniel eat the special food of the king?

- A. The lack of explanation suggests that the audience would have known the critical background information.
- B. Possible explanations:
 1. The food of the king was not kosher.
 - a) But they would not drink the wine.
 - (1) Wine is kosher.
 2. The king's food came with a commitment.

- a) In ancient times, to eat a meal with someone implied a relationship.
 - b) Commitment to the king
 - c) But how could any official allow these young men to eat the food, if this were the understanding?
3. Food was sacrificed to the gods.
- a) Implied devotion to the gods.
 - (1) Vegetables were emphasized which suggests no meat.
 - (2) We know that meat was often sacrificed to the gods in the ancient world.
 - b) But, was wine sacrificed to the gods?

C. I have another option to propose.

- 1. We learn in Daniel 10:3 that Daniel was fasting for three weeks at the beginning of the first month

10:3 I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all, for the full three weeks.

- a) No meat or wine
2. What is this?
- a) This was the time of Passover.
 - (1) Preparations started at the beginning of the month.
 - (2) Passover began on the 15th of the month.
 - (3) It lasted 7 days.
 - b) Celebrating Passover was relatively recent.
 - (1) Josiah reinstated it in about 622 BC.

2Kings 23:21 The king commanded all the people, "Keep the passover to the LORD your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant." 22 No such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah; 23 but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

- (2) But Daniel probably grew up celebrating Passover.
 - (3) He understood the significance of the holiday.
 - (4) It is a celebratory holiday.
- c) Why is Daniel mourning and fasting?
- (1) Passover celebrates God bringing his people out of slavery.
 - (2) Now they have gone back into slavery.
 - (a) This is an anti-exodus.
 - (3) So he is mourning rather than celebrating.
3. Could Daniel have been mourning his captivity in chapter 1?
- a) He had probably been taken captive in the fall of 605.
 - (1) Shortly thereafter he is selected to be in this training program (within a year).
 - (2) It could be Passover when the action in chapter 1 takes place.

- b) In chapter 1, I think Daniel was mourning during Passover just like he was 70 years later in chapter 10.
- 4. What would this mean for understanding our passage?
 - a) Daniel and his friends don't want to eat any celebratory foods for the first three weeks of the first month.
 - (1) They are lamenting the anti-exodus that has just occurred.
 - (a) They are mourning the sins of Judah that led to this result.
 - (b) They are praying for restoration.
 - b) Although his personal circumstances are good, Daniel is mourning the spiritual status of Israel.
 - (1) He refuses to forget the history of his people and where they are in God's plan.
 - (2) But this is in conflict with the requirements of the state.
 - (a) God allowed Daniel to find a niche where he could continue to fully identify with the people of God and not offend the state.
 - (i) Through the goodwill of some of his captors

IX. Conclusion

- A. God had not forgotten Israel.
 - 1. God is in control of history.
 - a) God is unconquerable.
 - 2. God still cares about his people.
 - a) This chapter is in Hebrew.
 - 3. Hints of the end were already there in the beginning.
 - a) Cyrus is mentioned at the end of the chapter.
 - (1) He liberated the Jews from Babylon.

“Nebuchadnezzar” spells invasion, siege, defeat, plundering, exile. “Cyrus” spells the end of each of these. “Nebuchadnezzar” brings the day of Yahweh’s abandoning his people to darkness and wrath, a historical experience and at the same time a pointer to ultimate darkness and wrath. “Cyrus” suggests deliverance and freedom, restoration, and rebuilding, the joy of going home. It, too, is a historical experience yet at the same time a pointer to the deliverance freedom, restoration, and joy of the End (cf. Isa 44:24-45:7) (Goldingay, p. 172)

- B. We see a godly individual facing Empire.
 - 1. Empire is not a monolithic evil.
 - a) Daniel does not take a purist stance.
 - (1) He takes a Babylonian name.
 - (2) He studies Babylonian literature and culture.
 - b) Jews were encouraged to participate in Babylonian culture.
 - (1) At a later date, Jeremiah wrote a letter to the Jews in Babylon.

Jer. 29:5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

- c) There were niches in the Empire where Daniel could be buffered from its power.
 - (1) Both the Palace Master and the guard were favorably disposed toward Daniel.
 - (2) Joseph and Esther had favor.
- C. Solidarity with God and His purposes takes precedence over Daniel's personal peace and prosperity.
 - 1. These comments are based on the assumption that I have correctly understood that Daniel refused the food because he was mourning the judgment of Judah.
 - 2. Daniel could have reveled in his personal good fortune.
 - a) He had fallen and landed on his feet.
 - b) He is living a privileged life in his captivity.
 - 3. But his heart is with his people.
 - a) He realizes that God is punishing his people for their sin.
 - b) He is lamenting the sins of Israel and the judgment.
 - 4. He is willing to risk his personal privilege out of solidarity with his people and recognition of what God is doing.
 - a) He would not have been violating a divine commandment.
 - b) He thought it was appropriate to recognize an anti-passover.
 - (1) This was so important that he risked losing his privilege by doing it.
 - c) But God honored Daniel's choice.
 - 5. Daniel could have died due to his choice.
 - a) But God wanted to show his support for Daniel's stance.

The genius and the limitation of a story of this kind is its concrete nature. As it may be impossible to move from an "is" to an "ought," it may be impossible to move from a narrative statement to a general statement, from "Yahweh enabled Daniel to triumph" to "Yahweh will enable us to the triumph." But a concrete story describes what Yahweh has been known to do, and it opens up the possibility that he might do it again, or might do something analogous. (Goldingay, p. 172)