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# Living God's Word among the Nations

## Daniel 1:1-21

**Introduction** The difficulty of living in great hardship. An example: John Bunyan living by faith unwilling to give up his convictions, imprisoned and having a blind daughter.

The challenges of living among the lost. An example: Working under a very ungodly man in Europe.

The context locating us in redemptive history.

- The covenant disobedience of Israel at Mt. Sinai.
- The continual disobedience of Israel through its history.
- Israel under the curse incurred by covenant disobedience,
- The captivity that would punish Israel:
  - Prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 28-30, especially chapter 30.
  - Proclaimed to Habakkuk calling for faith and submission.
  - Ministered during by Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylon.
  - Launched the times of the Gentiles that extends from the exile to the third horizon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.

The call to live out the Word of God as aliens and exiles in this world by 1 Peter highlights the struggles of serving and suffering while under submission. This is where we live. We are God's people among the nations. There we must live out God's Word under pressure to conform and compromise. This opening chapter maps out the landscape of trouble, trial and temptation where we need great wisdom and skill to be pleasing to God.

### **Their Difficult Situation** **(v.1-7)**

Daniel opens by connecting us to the world of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

### **Their Troubling Circumstances** **(v.1-2)**

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, 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 placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

We are told exactly when this took place. This is 605BC. Nebuchadnezzar came and captured Jerusalem. One short sentence to tell of a long siege - swords, spears, siege-engines, hunger, thirst, danger, death. Finally defeat, collapse, conquered. The rounding of those to be carried away – crying, pain, angry words, comforting whispers. The looting and loading up of the treasures from the Temple - bright treasures piled into carts, desecration, dirt, loss, despair.

But God gave the vessels of the Temple into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. He brought them and put them in his storehouse. They are taken and hoarded because of their monetary worth, not because of their spiritual or service significance. Here is the beginning of the transition. The vessels of the service of God are now in a foreign land. They have gone into exile along with a number of God's people.

God had brought them into this situation. It was a time of chastening and correction. It was a time for careful evaluation and recognition that God would not tolerate the sin of His people.

### **Their Spiritual Challenges**

**(v.3-5)**

<sup>3</sup> Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, <sup>4</sup> youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.

The Babylonians treated their captives different from the Assyrians who had conquered the ten northern tribes a number of years before. The Assyrians scattered the conquered peoples throughout their kingdom and forced them to integrate and lose their national identity. They could not speak their language, practice their religion nor celebrate their cultural and national festival. The result was that the 10 northern tribes were lost to history. They did not return when the exile was over.

The Babylonians used a different strategy. They allowed conquered peoples to retain their identity. But they took an elite from the nation and made Babylonians of them. They were to mediate the relationship between the conquered peoples and the Babylonians. This is what is going on here. Ashpenaz is being given the project of inculcating the Babylonian culture into the Jewish captives.

The Babylonians are making false assumptions about leadership. They are assuming that leadership was a matter of family and clan. They are looking for young people who will be respected, admired and followed. They are going to train up a new generation of Babylonian Jews.

How had the culture issues become moral issues to Daniel?

Literature and language were used to instill in them their new culture. The literature and language are largely how a culture expresses itself. The Babylonians had a rich heritage in literature which expressed their national history and their cultural aspirations.

Food was used to break down the distinction between their past and their future. With Jews in particular, food was a part of their covenantal obligation and their national identity. It was what set them apart from the Gentiles.

Education would train them for service along with their Jewish and Babylonian peers in order to shape their thinking. The constant exposure to a way of thinking and the development of friendships would greatly impact their life and relationships.

Their names were changed so as to more closely identify with their new culture.

What temptations would be tug at the heart of young men and women selected for such a role and responsibility? All the self-sins orbiting around pride could organize and orient their hearts.

They were identified as having a potential for leadership. Being singled out of the crowd by those whose favor is important can fuel a craving for approval and affirmation.

They were honored as being superior to their peers. They were chosen because they were smarter, quicker, and more attractive. We are not told how this was done, but it clearly was a thought through process that applied the standard. Being honored in this way would sorely tempt the heart to be come arrogant and haughty.

They were trained in the equivalent of cultural indoctrination. They received the highest, best and most intensive training in language, arts, science and governance that was available in the day. And all at government expense. The weeds of immodest intellectualism and self-sufficient independence grow in such soil.

## **Their Personal Identities**

**(v.6-7)**

<sup>6</sup> Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. <sup>7</sup> And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

The writer of Daniel lists those exiles on whom he is going to focus in the first half of the book. They are serving under the chief of the eunuchs. This probably means that Daniel and his three friends have been castrated if they are eunuchs. According to *Jerome's Commentary on Daniel*, Rabbinic tradition holds that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were descendants of King Hezekiah, based on Isaiah 39:7. In that verse Isaiah speaks these words to King Hezekiah: "And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon." [*Daniel*, Stoltz]

They are given new names. From these new names we can see the Babylonians desired to change their religion as well as their culture. Daniel, whose name means "God has judged" or "God is my Judge", was given the name Belteshazzar, which means "Lady, protect the king". Hananiah "Yahweh has been gracious" became Shadrach meaning "I am fearful of a god." Mishael, "Who is what God is?" was given the name Meshach, which means "I am despised, contemptible, humbled before my god." Azariah. "Yahweh has helped" was named Abednego, "Servant of Nebo" Nego was a Hebrew variation of the Babylonian name of the god Nebo. Nebo or Nabu, son of Bel, was the Babylonian god of writing and vegetation. [*Bible Knowledge Commentary*]

Let me encourage you to know and speak of these three friends of Daniel by their Hebrew names. We tend to know them from our children's stories and songs by

their Akkadian or Babylonian names. So, it is Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mischael, and Asariah.

## **Their Wise Strategy**

**(v.8-16)**

Observe how Daniel prepares and then works through each phase of a wise strategy in a careful, God-honoring way.

### **Determination for Obedience**

**(v.8)**

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

What affirmations and resolutions do we need in order to make a Biblical appeal?

#### **Believe in the Providence of God**

Daniel believes that God is in providential control of all that is happening. He is working in the midst of his circumstances. They have been sent into captivity. They are in the king's palace and system of education. They are here under this person in God's plan. So, they have a way to live a life pleasing to God here.

Your circumstances are also under the hand of God. No hard situation, bewildering reversal, severe trial is outside of His control. You must submit your heart so that you will desire what God has willed for you. You must affirm this so that you will seek to please God knowing by faith there is a way.

#### **Resolve to be Pleasing to God**

Daniel resolved to not defile himself. Why would food be a problem? Some of the food would have been disallowed. The Law forbade the eating of many types of food. These foods would almost certainly have been the staple diet of Gentiles like the Babylonians.

All of the food would have been offered to idols. History records for us that before food was served at the King's table, it was offered to the gods. The Law forbade the eating what had been sacrificed to idols.

Both of these regulations have been set aside in the New Covenant. All foods may now be eaten. The division over whether to eat meat offered to idols is addressed in the liberty texts in Romans and 1 Corinthians. But if we are going to live the Word in the midst of the nations, we will have to obey God in other areas. Presently, many Christians are going to struggle with properly honoring our new president. Many struggle with allowing the world to define their values. In all these things, we must be committed to obeying the Word.

The Scriptures show us a young man who was committed to godliness before he gets into the temptation. We need to have an internal purpose aimed at a wise and holy conduct. Do we believe that it is possible to please God no matter what our circumstances may be?

### **Appeal for Permission under God**

Daniel goes to the chief of the eunuchs and appeals for permission to not violate his conscience and convictions. He goes with the right attitude. It is an appeal. He asks; he does not demand. While he has resolved not to defile himself, he comes initially with a gentle spirit and a kind way.

But notice that he states the problem as one in relation to God. He states it as “not defiling himself”. This is Godward language. In his appeal is embedded the most important fact about Daniel. He is a “in respect to God” person.

What grace is needed for this! This is no easy situation. The temptations are great, the threat dire and the test severe. But his faith, resolve and manner all organize and orient his appeal.

### **Discernment in the Situation (v.9-11)**

<sup>9</sup> And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, <sup>10</sup> and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king.” <sup>11</sup> Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

In the midst of our difficult circumstances we must have real insight into the people and perspectives that are driving the problem. If he is to thrive and do good for the Babylonians he lives among, Daniel has to clear understand what is going on.

### **Seek Relationships Built by God's Grace (v.9)**

Discern the relationships God has brought about. The relationship that Daniel had with Ashpenaz was both God's grace and Daniel's efforts. God had given Daniel favor in the eyes of the overseer. His appeal is sent across a relationship that God had brought about. But it also is a relationship that Daniel almost certainly cultivated. He is acting in concert with God's gracious work.

Brothers and sisters, many of our problems with those who are over us are not in *their actions* as much as it is in *our attitudes*. We have not built relationships over which or to which we may appeal. May God give us these kinds of relationships. May God give us eyes to see them and hearts to cultivate them.

### **Understand the Person Over You (v.10)**

Work at understanding the motivations and requirements of the person you are working with. Daniel listens carefully to what Ashpenaz says. The way he moves forward with the steward reflects that he has understood Ashpenaz's position.

#### **What are his personal motivations?**

He has a fear of the king. Nebuchadnezzar had absolute rule over his subjects and servants. Ashpenaz fears what may happen if he does not produce what the king requires. Understanding what is motivating the

person over you particularly when it is fear will really help you in making an appeal.

### **To whom does he answer?**

The king has chosen the menu. This is not Ashpenaz's choice of foods. The king has assigned him to implement the plan the king has outlined. It is clear then that he is working for and reports directly to the king. This is important for what Daniel chooses to do next.

### **What is expected of him?**

Daniel also understands what is expected of Ashpenaz and at a lesser level, what is expected of him. If he is going to work at a strategy for obedience in this situation, he needs to know what is being expected. Often, people begin to debate and assert their rights without a real recognition of what had been expected of them. Ashpenaz understands what the king requires and communicates it clearly.

### **What is at stake for him?**

Daniel is told what is at stake for Ashpenaz. This is not a matter of a promotion or a job loss. This is not the loss of standing with the boss. Literally, his head is at risk. As we prepare to formulate an appeal, we need to know what is at stake for those we are appealing to. This will help us to establish a trajectory that does not put them at risk.

## **Clarify their Goals/Aims/Objectives**

**(v.10)**

Daniel now understands that the physical appearance and athleticism is what is being aimed at. Remember that these are people who have come out of a long siege and conquest. They have made a long journey to Babylon. The king wants to surround himself with people who look like they have been well taken care of. His reputation with other nations is at stake. He wants the respect of the Jews. If the elite of their leadership look malnourished and mistreated, if they are not well fed, well cared for and physically strong how will he have the respect of the Jews?

So it is important for us when preparing an appeal to clarify the aim of the order, the command, the requirement. Some objectives are unbiblical and require that we appeal for a change in the objective. Some objectives are Biblical, but the process to reach those objectives involves compromise. But we will misspend the coin of our appeal if we do not know what is on shelf.

## **Identify the Person to Appeal To**

**(v.11)**

Daniel realizes that Ashpenaz will not risk his life to even entertain an alternative plan. However, there is a steward who is responsible to work with Daniel and his three friends on a daily basis. He serves under Ashpenaz and yet seems to have some latitude. So Daniel approaches him. He is the one who will bring their food each day. He is the one who would be able to give them something different without risk to Ashpenaz. Here is careful wisdom seeking to please God under threat and in exile.

## **Development of an Alternative (v.12-13)**

<sup>11</sup> Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see."

The core concept in a Biblical appeal is the development of an alternative plan. Here Daniel does just that.

### **Propose an Alternative Course of Action (v.12)**

Daniel proposes a different diet. Because he cannot be sure that any meat brought will be Kosher, he proposes a diet of vegetables and water. There is nothing spiritual about this diet. It is the best way for him to be sure that what they are eating does meet the Mosaic Law's requirements.

In making a godly appeal the alternative must propose a course of action aimed at the same objective while attaining it through Biblical means. If the aim is unbiblical, the proposal must challenge both the objective and the aim. That is much more difficult and is worked out for us in other texts.

### **Establish an Agreed on Test of Results (v.13a)**

Based on what he knew their aims were, Daniel proposed that the diet be tested. In other words, after ten days of eating the alternative diet, the steward should check them out to see if the diet was achieving the desired results.

So, when you make an appeal, there must be an agreed upon way of determining if the objectives have been met. Do not assume that articulating the objectives establishes the standard. Be specific.

### **Affirm Submission by Committing to the Results (v.13b)**

Daniel commits himself to the results of the test. Remember, he is talking to the steward. He is confident in what his obedience will produce. He is sure that they are working together, he and the steward, to meet the requirements the king has set for Ashpenaz. He is willing to submit himself to the steward's evaluation.

This is where we must utterly trust God. If we have developed a Biblical plan whose results can be tested against the identified objectives, then we have to commit ourselves to the consequences that God brings about.

**Delay Waiting for God to Act****(v.14-16)**

<sup>14</sup> So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. <sup>15</sup> At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. <sup>16</sup> So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

The steward listens to them and implements Daniel's diet. Over ten days, they eat only vegetables and water. When it was all done, Daniel and his three friends are examined by the steward. Sure enough, they meet the standard the king has set.

In making an appeal, we must be patient. We must give God time to act in our situation. We pray and wait while God works:

To change their hearts – God can and often does move to change the hearts of those we are working under and are accountable to.

To work out the consequences – God is in charge of the consequences. We have to do what God requires of us. And, we must depend on Him, not our skills or strategies or strengths.

**Their Wonderful Success****(v.17-21)**

<sup>17</sup> As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. <sup>18</sup> At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. <sup>20</sup> And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. <sup>21</sup> And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

God shows us the reward and responsibility that comes from knowing how to appeal to authority.

**Grace for their Abilities****(v.17-19)**

Their ability was the effect of God's gracious provision. While the aim of the training and education was to transform them into Babylonians, they were able to excel and still be pleasing to God. They were able to turn the education to their own advantage. God gave to Daniel supernatural ability to understand dreams and visions. He is enabled and equipped for advancement in the kingdom of men and understanding of the kingdom of God.

**Excellence in their Attainments****(v.20)**

Their attainment was an objective of God's great providence. In the midst of exile, living as God's people among pagans, they were able to stand before the king, answer all his questions and stand out above their Babylonian peers. To thrive and do good among the nations, we must simply do our best at whatever we put our hand to. Being better than the world is not the point, though it may be the effect. We must aim to be pleasing to God in how we diligently apply ourselves to the best of our ability in the context we find ourselves.



## Longevity in Daniel's Accomplishments (v.21)

The appeal, ability and attainment enabled Daniel to serve under several successive conquerors. In other words, he was able to thrive and do good not just under his initial situation but over the whole seventy years under a number of godless pagan rulers.

These are the consequences God's purposes and providences brought about. Ours will almost certainly be different. The key is that we appeal, obey and trust for the glory of God. The consequences must be in His hands.

**Conclusion** Watch how the process of appeal develops:

- **Captivity** – the situation in which it is needed.
- **Character** – the kind of people we are dealing with
- **Conviction** – the commitment to purity and submission
- **Conduct** – both the how and what of how we appeal
- **Consequences** – what God in His providence brings to pass.

God does not always put us in ideal conditions to exercise our godliness. In fact, godliness is best seen against the backdrop of terrible evil.

Without a deep commitment to holiness, we will be overwhelmed by the ambiguous areas; the subtle threats to our relationship with the Lord.

When we are dealing with a hostile authority who wants us to sin, we must use the principle of appeal to overcome.

Determination – be deeply committed to obeying and pleasing God.

Discernment – carefully seek to understand your situation

- What relationships would God have you cultivate?
- Seek to engage and understand the person over you.
- Clarify their goals, aims or objectives.
- Identify the right person to appeal to.

Develop – work out godly alternative even if it means personal sacrifice.

Delay – Be willing to wait for God to act.

When we propose an alternate and its test, we had better be ready to live with the consequences. So we should let God have time to work.

The blessings of overcoming by appeal often will exceed our expectations.

May God grant us to live out God's Word among the nations for the glory of Christ and the good of those we live among.

