

Daniel 1 - John Karmelich

A few weeks back, the topic came up in my midweek bible study group of what is our favorite book in the Old Testament? Unlike most of the group I stated Daniel. Why, because it was written before 500 BC and accurately predicts when the Messiah (Jesus) would be on the scene. It also tells us a lot about Israel's future from that date and even gets a bit into the end times. So how does any of this affect me? Realize Daniel was written when Israel was destroyed by a foreign empire. It seemed all was lost, and God no longer cared about Israel as an entity. In effect it teaches us how we're to be a good witness for God when all seems lost and we think He doesn't care anymore about us! A key point here is that God is still guiding His people despite the fact Israel wasn't a country at the time this was written. We need to remember He's still guiding the lives of those who trust in Him in spite of whatever problems we are dealing with at this moment.

Yes I'll get into a lot more details about what Daniel is about and why it's structured the way it is. What I first want all of us to realize is it's not here for us to learn history, but about how to be a good witness for Jesus in spite of whatever we're dealing with. In the time frame of this book, we'll read of Daniel as a teenager being deported to Babylon until he was probably in his nineties and he served personally not only the leader of this empire but he also was the top leader for the guy who conquered that empire! It's one big lesson on how to be a witness for God no matter what the situation. It's why this is my favorite Old Testament book. Yes it gets strange at times and is hard to understand predictions about what will happen in the future, but still it's full of great lessons on how to be a witness for Jesus no matter what is the situation we face at any given moment.

Before I get into details about Chapter 1, let me give a quick overview of this book. The first thing one should know is the first six chapters are "snippets" of Daniel's long life that he lived in Babylon. It has some of the most famous stories in the bible, including "Daniel in the Lion's Den" as an example. Then the final six chapters can be thought of as "appendixes", as they are predictions about the future that he got during the time frame of the first six chapters. Some of those predictions already occurred and then we get a bunch of verses about the "end times" which is hard to understand, because it hasn't happened yet! My point is to please be patient as we go through familiar ground and stories that are confusing as it describes future events that haven't occurred yet.

With that said, let me talk a bit more about when this is written and why we should believe Daniel was the author and wrote it when he did. First of all, if you believe Jesus is God, realize He said Daniel did write this book and we (that's you and me) should study it! (See Mark 13:34.) Some Bible critics refuse to believe Daniel wrote it because he gives details of Israel's future in explicit detail of the Persian and Greek rulers who conquered the Middle East not far till the time Jesus came on the scene. The problem with those who "late date Daniel" is the entire Old Testament was translated into Greek about 270 BC. Further, Jesus said Daniel wrote Daniel, so how can I disagree with the Lord of my life? Bottom line I am positive Daniel wrote Daniel living in Babylon, (a city in Iraq today) from about 605 BC to 538BC. Daniel was probably born about 620BC. I'd argue the book was written mainly to teach us how to be a good witness for God especially when "all seems lost".

OK then, time for my Chapter 1 summary: To explain this chapter, I need to include some information about the history of Babylon. Think of it as a city who ruled much of the known world at that time just as Rome did roughly six centuries later. Not too long before Daniel was taken captive, Babylon won a major war in the Middle East when they destroyed the Assyrian Empire. There was only one other big "fish" in the Middle East and that was Egypt. For Babylon to take on Egypt they had to travel through

Israel. Babylon in effect conquered Israel in three phases, 605BC, 597BC and 586BC. The first one in effect was Babylon saying, "We're in charge here now, deal with it!" The reason for a second invasion and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 essentially boiled down to Israel's refusal to accept Babylon as their ruler. Anyway the first time the Babylonians were saying in effect, we're going to take some kids here ransom so we can train them in our culture so they can come back and rule over this area. Daniel and three of his buddies (the main characters in the first few chapters of this book) were among what is estimated to be 50-75 young men who were taken to Babylon for further training.

To put it simply this was a "brainwashing" operation. To take teenagers, go teach them a new language give them new names (after the Babylonian gods), teach them all about Babylonian culture and be feed the best of their food was for the lack of a better term a "brainwashing" operation. The book of Daniel opens with the fact Daniel and three of his friends (named in this chapter) were among those taken and subject to this process. In effect I just summarized the first paragraph of this chapter. We also meet the Babylonian official in charge of this operation.

The impressive part of Chapter 1 is here was Daniel, probably 15 years old (plus or minus two years at the most) going through all of this and still is a good witness for God in spite of all of this. The way he does that is by refusing to violate the Old Testament. There was no biblical law forbidding the Jewish people to learn non-Jewish stuff or even live outside of Israel. However, eating food offered to idols is well "a line in the sand" Daniel refused to cross. So he tells the guy in charge in effect, "Let me and my three friends eat only vegetables for ten days and see what happens". The guy in charge was afraid for his job/life so he resists but agrees to a 10-day test. A small miracle occurs so that Daniel and his gang had the same body fat as the others (others taken from Israel!) who ate the kings food. So, for the next three years (the total amount of training time) Daniel and his three friends ate a "vegan diet" while the rest of the deportees ate the meat dedicated to the Babylonian gods!

The final part of Chapter 1 moves to the end of the three year testing time. Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the Babylonian empire now had to see if this brainwashing plan worked. He obviously went to lots of trouble with the probable goal of having these young men help rule over Israel since they grew up in that culture. When Daniel and his three friends were presented to the king they were "10-times" better than everyone else who took this test. I don't know how Nebuchadnezzar measured "10-times" but the point is Daniel and his three friends stood out from everyone else! Why, because they trusted God as a witness for Him, remember this was during a time when Israel was subject to the Babylonian Empire, a group that destroyed much of that country and leveled Jerusalem! Even when their rule over Israel did end 70 years later, Daniel stayed in Babylon as he a top guy under Nebuchadnezzar and even was a top guy under the group that conquered Babylon again 70 years later. The last verse of Chapter 1 states the fact that Daniel stayed there that long.

Again, the lesson for us is not to be an expert on Middle East History around 600BC. It's to help us see how to be a good witness for Jesus, especially during the times when all feels hopeless! This happened at a time when Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed for the first time since Israel came into the land that God promised them. Therefore, the Israelites had to be discouraged. To have one of their own as a top leader in Babylon was God saying in effect, "Even when all seems lost" God's still on the throne as He's still "Pulling the strings" to guide the world the way He wants it to go. Our job is to continue to be a witness for Him, no matter the circumstances or no matter what life throws at it. Daniel didn't start a rebellion against the Babylonians. He simply did what he could to be a good witness for God despite a situation that most of us would fail to try to make a difference! My point is if Daniel could do this then we too can find simple ways to be witness for Him in this world. If we're not sure how ask Him to give us such opportunities. He will always lead us for His glory, if we ask Him!

If interested, the other two links on Chapter 1 are for a more detailed lesson on this chapter that I wrote about twenty years ago. You're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John