

DANIEL

FAR FROM HOME

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DANIEL: Far From Home
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**40 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

These verses set the context for the whole book. They also introduce us to some of its big themes. Verse 1 tells us that we are in the early years of the sixth century BC. God's people, Israel, had split into two kingdoms after the reign of Solomon. The larger, northern kingdom, retaining the name Israel, had been destroyed 140 years earlier. The southern kingdom, Judah, survived longer. But now it was under siege from the king of the then world superpower, Babylon.

Although Babylon versus Judah was no contest, verse 2 tells us that the Lord delivered the king of Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hands. The reason for this is explained in 2 Kings 24 and 2 Chronicles 36. There we learn that the king and the people rejected the Lord, and refused to listen to the warnings of the prophets.

Verse 2 is therefore telling us that the defeat of Judah and the removal of articles from the Temple (which was also destroyed by the Babylonians) was the judgement of God on Judah. It also shows us that while Nebuchadnezzar was king of the Babylonians, God was the one who ultimately ruled.

It wasn't just articles from the Temple that were taken to Babylon. In verses 3 to 7 a particular group from Judah are exiled into Babylon. It was a brilliant strategy by Nebuchadnezzar. He exiled anyone who might lead a rebellion against him, and he sought to turn

them into Babylonians. His state-funded, three-year course at the University of Babylon would fill the exiles' stomachs with the food of Babylon and their minds with the culture of Babylon so that they would become Babylonians.

Among the exiles are four men who feature throughout the rest of the book, found in verses 6 and 7. These four represent the many who are exiled to Babylon. They are placed in a strange pagan land that seeks to make them just like the Babylonian world around them. Just as Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden as a result of their sin, so Judah is exiled from her land as a result of her sin.

The situation for these exiles is similar to ours. The apostle Peter describes us as aliens and strangers in this world (1 Pet. 2:11). The apostle Paul tells us that we are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). We live in a world that seeks to make us conform to its ways (Rom. 12:2). The pressures to compromise that the exiles are about to face are similar to the pressures we face, too.

REFLECTION

Why is it that we forget that we are exiles in this world? What impact do you think it would make if we were more conscious of our real home being heaven?

In verses 1 to 7 we have seen that Daniel and his friends are living in a strange land. We see them learning the language and the literature of Babylon (v. 4). Furthermore, they received new Babylonian names (v. 7). In other words, these four men engaged with the world in which God had placed them.

However, being part of the world can only go so far. There is a point where cooperation becomes compromise. And for Daniel we see that in verse 8.

There has been much debate as to why Daniel saw this as the line not to cross. It is unlikely that the issue is over the food laws of Leviticus 11. More probable is that Daniel knew the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah, centuries earlier, had warned the people of Jerusalem of God's judgement. Judgement from God should have been marked by mourning (see Isa. 22:12,13), though in fact he says that people will 'eat and drink... for tomorrow we die'. The exile was the judgement of God at Judah's sin. This was a time for mourning, nor feasting.

Daniel knew that instead of eating and drinking from the king's table, he should not 'defile' himself. The word 'defile' means Daniel knew that to eat and drink the king's food and wine would make him unclean in God's sight. It would be sin.

Notice (v. 8) that Daniel doesn't just 'resolve'. Resolve without action is just good intention!

In verses 9 and 10 we see that God (who we have already seen is in control,

v. 2) causes the official to show favour to Daniel, despite his fear of the king. We are allowed to see behind the scenes here and learn that God is at work. Daniel doesn't know this at this point.

The resolve of verse 8 is accompanied by the action that Daniel takes in verses 11 to 14. He asks the official to allow the exiles a ten-day vegan diet. Daniel appears confident that the Lord will cause those who stand firm for Him to be vindicated. His resolve and action could have had awful consequences. But placed in a strange land, here we see Daniel is determined to stand firm in obedience to God's word.

In the book of Daniel we will see the exiles under pressure to break God's law (e.g. in chapters 3 and 6). In those situations, standing for God rather than going along with the world would result in a death penalty. Might it be that Daniel was able to stand out and obey God's word later because he had resolved to stand out for God right from the start? Might it be that standing out and obeying God's word on a seemingly 'small' issue made it easier to stand out on issues of life and death later?

REFLECTION

God wants us to stand for Him in the world. How do we learn the line between involvement in the world and compromise with the world?