

Daniel - Man of God's Purpose

The book of Daniel opens with what must have felt like the death throes of God's Chosen People. About 120 years earlier, the Assyrians had invaded and removed the ten tribes of the divided kingdom, leaving only Judah and Benjamin – plus the Levites (**2 Kings 17**). Now Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jerusalem. Was this now the end?

Jeremiah had prophesied that punishment was coming to the people of Judah as a result of their persistent disobedience (**Jer.25:8-14**). Yes, it would be terrible devastation, but it would last just 70 years, not for ever.

As young teenagers, Daniel and his friends found themselves uprooted and transported to Babylon. They were young, but not too young to realise what was going on. Maybe they had even heard that unpopular man Jeremiah as he spoke on Jerusalem's streets, foretelling Judah's downfall.

Daniel himself seems to have lived until about the end of the 70 years' exile. In that time, he acted as a close advisor to several kings but probably also spent time in relative obscurity. What sort of man was he, and what does the Lord want to show us?

A Man of Character Right from the start, there was something special about Daniel. He was picked out (with some others) as being good-looking, intelligent, understanding and discerning, suitable for training up to serve the king. Not bad for a teenager! (**1:3-4**) Just a few years later, when Daniel was about 28, his reputation was already great – see **Ezekiel 14:14 & 20**. He was highly esteemed by God (**10:11,19**).

A Man of Courage and Principle Perhaps why Daniel is best known! From an early age he knew that he was part of God's people and belonged to God's rule, His kingdom, rather than the kingdom of any earthly ruler. He took his stand about the king's food (**1:8-16**) and about praying to God rather than the king (**ch.6**). His courage also extended into his role as :-

A Man of Vision Time and again, the LORD showed Daniel things. Sometimes he could understand them, sometimes not, but he recorded them faithfully for his own generation and the future.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (**ch.2**). God not only gave Daniel the interpretation, he revealed the dream itself as well! Daniel really had to go out on a limb on this one!

Nebuchadnezzar's Vision (**ch.4**). The vision was the king's but the interpretation was clear and scary for Daniel. He hesitated to declare it (**4:19**). An advisor could easily lose his life for giving the king bad news, but it says much for his standing that the king encouraged him to speak out whatever the message.

Belshazzar's Feast (**ch.5**) Another well-known passage, and again Daniel does not hold back with the interpretation. His warning to Belshazzar (**5:22**) is very direct!

A Vision of the Kingdom of God (**ch.7**). The first of Daniel's 'independent' visions. Some exciting stuff here which seems to relate to visions in **Revelation**, and some which was quoted directly by Jesus as part of his claim to being the Messiah. See the link between 'clouds of heaven' in **v.13** and these verses: **Matthew 24:30, 26:64, Mark 13:26, 14:62, Luke 21:27, Acts 1:9-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 1:7**. You and I are in this chapter too! Look for 'holy people of the Most High' ('saints' in the New Testament sense) – that's us!

The Vision of the Ram and the Goat (**ch.8**). Daniel couldn't understand it, and Gabriel told him that it was for later, not his own time.

Direct personal instruction from Gabriel. (**ch.9**) Wow! Followed by three more chapters of vision and instruction which relate to later times. Daniel says he wants to know more, but is told that most of the vision is "*rolled up and sealed until the time of the end*" (**12:9**). He faithfully records it and it is available to us – to be understood as the Holy Spirit enables us.

In spite of all the wonderful things that the LORD showed him, Daniel remains **A Man of Great Humility** When revealing and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel insists that it is from God, not his own ability (**2:19-23,30**). He refuses Belshazzar's offer of riches, celebrity and power (**5:16-17**). What we can easily miss as we read Daniel is that he was not always in the spotlight. The book spans 70 years of Daniel's life and he was not sought out by every king but often slipped back into obscurity. Belshazzar's question to him in **5:13** would be unlikely if he were currently an established figure in the king's court.

A Man of God's Purpose In all of this, Daniel was very aware that, with the rest of God's Chosen People, he was many miles away from the Promised Land and that they were there because of disobedience. As the years went by and Daniel approached his eighties, he knew that the 70 years of exile were due to come to an end very soon, but he made no assumptions that it would 'just happen'.

See him in **chapter 9** as he studies the word of the LORD to Jeremiah. He doesn't just say 'OK, God, time's up, now You need to move us back to Jerusalem'. No, he becomes personally involved in the way that the disobedience of the Chosen People has frustrated the purposes of God. He was only a child at the time of the exile, he has lived nearly 70 more years of an exemplary life, but he still takes on the shame, rebellion and open disobedience that brought them to Babylon.

Daniel already knew from **Jeremiah 25:9, 27:6 & 43:10** that Nebuchadnezzar had been acting as the servant of God when he took the

people into exile and reduced Jerusalem to rubble. (The king needed reminding in **Daniel 4:25**!) Cyrus was marked out (perhaps surprisingly) as God's Shepherd and His Anointed in **Isaiah 44:28 & 45:1**, and it is he who gives the order for the people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild it (**2 Chronicles 36:22 & Ezra 1:1-4**).

But if we read on in **Isaiah 45** we can see that the whole point of what the LORD gives Cyrus to do is **directly related to God's purpose for His people**.

As we read through Daniel, the same truth keeps shining through. God is at work and His purpose gives direction to all that happens. Daniel often meets with kings, but it is the rule of God which determines his actions. In fact, if we were to take away Daniel's growing appreciation of the Kingdom of God, there would be little left of his exploits or his visions.

There is no evidence that Daniel ever returned to Jerusalem. He would have been in his mid-eighties, contemporary with those who saw the beginnings of the rebuilt temple in **Haggai 2:1-9** and thought little of it. After all, it bore no comparison with the splendour of Solomon's temple – but the LORD had a different view! (See **Haggai 2:6-9 & Hebrews 12:26-29**)

By the way, we don't know whether Daniel had any influence in the court of Cyrus, but we do know that he was still around (**10:1**), so it is quite possible that he had some direct involvement with Cyrus's perception of the will of God. Interestingly, in **Ezra 1:2** Cyrus refers to "*the LORD, the God of heaven*". 'The LORD' represents YHWH, the Name of God, revealed to Moses and regarded by the Jews as too holy to pronounce. 'The God of heaven' is probably the commonest title for God right through the book of Daniel, especially when Daniel is dealing with non-Jews. No non-Jew would normally use the name 'the LORD' when referring to 'God' in a general sense, so why is Cyrus, king of Persia, using it? Could it be that he had been instructed by Daniel?

Daniel, then, was a man who knew the top priority of belonging to the Kingdom of God and threw everything into discovering God's purpose and being part of its fulfilment. The words in **Isaiah 46:9-10** seem to sum up Daniel's clear understanding:

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do. Listen to me, you stubborn-hearted, you who are now far from my righteousness. I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion, my splendour to Israel."

So what about us? We certainly do not have the same levels of responsibility that Daniel did; our situation seems very different. Do we feel rather scared of this man's level of godliness and single-mindedness?

By trusting in the Lord Jesus, we have become part of God's family (**John 1:10-13**) by individual new birth, not just by happening to be born a Jew! We have been transferred into kingdom of His Son (**Colossians 1:12-14**) and share in His inheritance. With all other believers, we are the 'holy people of the Most High' shown to Daniel in **Daniel 7**!

In fact, we have MORE than Daniel had, or any of the other great figures from the Old Testament. We have direct access to God without a human priesthood in the way, we have forgiveness without a complicated system of sacrifices. **Acts 13:36-39** is clear! The Old Testament heroes that we read about served the purposes of God in their generations (as King David did) but were longing for the time when the New Covenant would be brought in (**Hebrews 8:8-13**, quoting **Jeremiah 31**). See also **Hebrews 11:39-40** – amazing!

The normal situation for a Christian is to experience not only forgiveness but also the reality of the Holy Spirit transforming us from the inside, **plus** the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which in Old Testament times was reserved for special people in special situations. We have been given so much more than they had!

In some ways, God's priorities have not changed – He is still intent on having a people for His possession. Just as all the momentous events around Daniel were insignificant compared with what the LORD was doing, so again today. God is doing one thing: **He is building His Church.**

Not our priorities, our ideas and our organisation, but His! Not our agendas and assumptions, but a preparedness to allow the Lord to totally remake our thinking (**Romans 12:1-2**). Not just 'business as usual'!

Daniel was marked out as a man of God's purpose. He knew who he was and where he stood, and he set his heart to know, understand and follow the purpose of God. His life prepared the way for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple.

To achieve His purpose today, God wants to see the Church being restored and making herself ready like a bride (**Ephesians 5:25-27**, **Revelation 19:7-8**, **21:1-2**). Without that, His purpose will remain unfulfilled. Is anything else more important? He looks for men and women of His purpose.

Dave Taylor

January 2012

Further copies can be downloaded from www.justonecandle.uk