ANDREASCOURSE-5



Week5: 'Not to give in'

The first chapters of the book of Daniel

Intro

With a big jump we have gone from one exile (in Egypt) to another (the Babylonian exile). Presumably there are 10 centuries in between. A large part of the Old Testament deals with that period of a thousand years. To give a rough sketch:

- After a journey of 40 years trough the wilderness, the people of Israel finally marched into the promised land, led by Joshua, successor of Moses.

- That first period is one of uncertainty, where Jews had problems with Moab, Amalekites, Edomites, Philistines etc. who wanted, more than anything else, for the people of Israel to disappear from the face of the earth.

- During this period of time 'judges', charismatic persons, gave direction to the struggle for survival of the Jewish people (described in the Book of Judges).

- Than comes the period of the kings, described in the books of the Bible: 1 & 2 Samuel. 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles. The first king is Saul, who is rejected by God because he decided in the end to follow his own way. After Saul there's David, we know him by the psalms. Meanwhile prophets appear amongst the people. First there is Samuel, than Isaiah and Jeremiah. Elijah and Elisa are also well known. The prophets pointed out to the kings and the people who God was for them and how they should serve Him.

- A common thread through all the Books of Prophets, you may notice, is that very often people are not listening, find the gods of people around them more attractive, and turn their back on the God of their ancestors.

- The prophets predicted the Babylonian exile. God was going to cause a lot of trouble for his people because of their disobedience. In 587 BC Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. But prophets did predict that the Jews would return in 70 years time. Under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah attention is given to restoration and renewal.

The book of Daniel takes place in the beginning of the exile. Daniel and his friends belong to the upper class, who were in the first deportation to Babel while king Jojakim was ruling. Soon after that Jerusalem would be destroyed. So Daniel and his friends are prisoners of war.

Despite the fact that Daniel and his friends are prisoners of war, they are of enormous value to the Babylonian empire. It's remarkable they devote themselves to the community and carefully fulfill their responsibilities, even though they are in enemy

territory. Meanwhile we see how God protects them and gives them courage to hold on to His will, even when it may cost them their lives. It's remarkable how these young men receive guidance from God, again and again. Daniel and his friends find strength in prayer. Three times a day Daniel prays, with windows open, facing Jerusalem.

Here the Bible passages for 6 days for personal reflection:

Day 1: Daniel 1: 1-9. *Being available and at the same time refusing.*

- Ease your thoughts and feelings, pray if possible.
- Read and reread the section of text, note your questions and insights.
- Questions:
    - What strikes you in the attitude of Daniel and his friends when it comes to an appeal to their availability?
    - The young men are given different names (verse 7) and different eating habits so they will be assimilated in the religious atmosphere of the Babylonian court. Whereby do you think Daniel's decision is inspired (verse 8)? Can you think of situations where you have to combine 'availability' with 'refusal' ?
- If possible, end in prayer



Day 2: Daniel 1: 10-21. *Test of faith.*

- Try to find time to concentrate and pray.
- Read and reread, think, if possible write down.
- Questions:

    - Verse 12; Daniel asks the chief eunuch (leading court official, often castrati) to agree to a 'test'. Do you find Daniels approach appealing ? Why/why not?

    - The last verse (21) is a striking sentence. Daniel remained, while rulers perished. How is it possible for a man to endure, to survive? Where do you think is the secret to persevere in a world full of temptation and confusion?

- Would you dare to do such a 'test of faith'? Pray for insight and God's guidance.

Day 3: Daniel 2: 10-23. *Seeking God's guidance during times of crises.*

- Ask God for quietness, new visions.

- (Re)read, think, write….
- Questions:
    - Nebuchadnezzar embarrasses all his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers. They have to explain to him the meaning of his dreams. Nobody knows the answer. Acting like a real tyrant, he decides to eliminate them all. Again, Daniel takes a big step forward in faith. He asks for a respite, but he does more (verse 17 and beyond). What do you think is remarkable in what Daniel does?
    - 'Haste makes waste'. Why is that? Society seems like a flywheel, spinning faster and faster – fatal. 'Relaxation' can save your life, as it becomes clear in this passage. What do you think is really needed to relax?
- If possible end in prayer. Besides a 'standard' prayer, you could also take the worship in verse 20-23 as your personal prayer.

Dag 4: Daniel 2: 24-30. *Daniel's testimony*.

- Bring to God what bothers you, what gives you trouble.
- Add imaginary exclamation and question marks to the text.
- Questions:
    - In this passage everything bears witness of God's power, no matter what people contrive. Seek out how that is demonstrated.
    - Daniel gives credits to God when he stands before the despot. What would you do in a situation like this? What would you say? Would you feel free to give all the glory to God?
- An indication for prayer: what does God want from me in the presence of superiors? Write your prayer down if you find it difficult to speak out.

Day 5: Daniel 3: 4-6 and 14-18. *Not to bow down before an idol*.



- If possible, give thanks to God for being able to come into His presence, away from the bustle.
- Read and contemplate…
- Questions:

- In this story it really gets serious for Daniel's friends. If they do not worship the statue that Nebuchadnezzar erected, the oven is waiting for them.

  Not really an attractive prospect! But they refuse to kneel down. What makes them persistent, even though it may cost them their lives?

- There are many examples of people who hold on to their faith in Christ, despite the fact that they were thrown in front of lions or end up on pyres. Even now many Christians are persecuted. Imagine…would you let it get that far?

• You can ask in prayer if God is willing to reveal His love to you, so you will never let Him go, even if it might cost you your life.

Day 6: Daniel 6: 11-24. *Prayer in the lion's den.*

• Bring to God what occupies you.

• Questions:

- This is one of the most famous parts of the book of Daniel. Due to his faith, Daniel ends up in the lion's den, but is miraculously saved by God. Where in this text would you like to put an exclamation mark because it addresses you? And a question mark?

- What, in the end, is the 'secret' that keeps Daniel going, despite jealousy and all the efforts to overthrow him?

• Daniel found peace and guidance in prayer. Pray for real faith, insight and courage if a 'den filled with lions and bears' awaits you.