

Sunday July 12, 2020

## Lesson 6: Wisdom to Navigate Life's Challenges

Scripture: Daniel 1: 8-17

### **Context:**

We move to another part of the Old Testament highlighting another individual who was a prophet of sorts. The Book of Daniel examines several individuals during the exile, those who demonstrated great fortitude and forbearance. Today we look at the namesake of the book, Daniel, who displayed the power of God's wisdom.

The Book of Daniel is a contested book in scholarly circles. In Jewish tradition, it is placed among the Writings, the latter part of the Hebrew Bible because it was not written until the second century BCE.<sup>1</sup> In the Christian scriptures, it is placed among the prophets because of the predictions found in the second part of the book even though Daniel is never officially called a prophet in the book.<sup>2</sup> There are actually two parts of the book with the first six chapters being heroic fiction and the second six chapters being apocalyptic traditions.<sup>3</sup> Our lesson will focus on the narrative from the first part of the book where we learn more about the protagonist Daniel.

While a part of the Diaspora in exile under King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and some of his companions are selected to receive training in the royal court. However, they look upon the rich food and royal wine and are reminded of the Jewish beliefs and practices. Daniel wants to observe the dietary laws of his faith and this diet clashes because it is impure.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Daniel goes to his supervisor with a plan in place. The supervisor is still nervous because he knows if Daniel and the others look thinner than the others, the king will have his head for not properly feeding them.

So Daniel proposes they have a contest. He and his companions will eat the diet of vegetables and water, while the other young men in court will consume the royal wine and rich food for ten days. At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his companions looked better. They are more fit than the king's men and have more energy. So a new diet was put in place. All royal men in the king's training camps would go on this diet of vegetables and water.

The chapter concludes with God giving Daniel and his companions knowledge,

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 527.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 527.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 527.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 528.

mastery of literature, and wisdom. And Daniel receives visions and dreams and is given the understanding of what they mean. Daniel's actions were a precursor to the gifts God had already given him and would continue to give to him.

### **Application**

This chapter of Daniel was once used to develop a whole diet plan. Trade in alcohol, fatty meat, and starchy food and receive vegetables and water. The results would be your body being transformed and you would be like Daniel and his companions, fit and ready for the challenges of today.

In some ways there is a lot of truth to that diet; eating vegetables and drinking water will help you keep a clean system. Yet there is the more important aspect of the wisdom coming with such a diet and the thinking process by which Daniel made his decision. Daniel not only followed the dietary laws of his faith, he also used wisdom to discern how to navigate a tricky situation and also listen to what his body needed.

For me, wisdom is perhaps what I pray for alongside patience. With the prayer for wisdom comes the discernment of what decisions to make from daily ones like what tasks to focus upon that day to wisdom about what ways to lead a group or a church. My constant prayer is for me to make the best decisions, which honor my Lord and those around me.

Perhaps we should take a note from Daniel and pay attention to both our own gut feelings. We should think of the wisdom coming from the Word and those before us. Daniel knew of his traditions even away from home because he had studied them and also thought on the teachings of those who came before him.

Often, I find Word will meet us right where we are on our journey. I'll never forget first thing in the morning reading a story titled "Coronavirus Predicted to Extend in 2021." For once, I didn't finish an article, instead conjuring up all the doom and gloom to come. And then in my daily devotion, I was reminded of the words from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter six, verse thirty- four: "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." What profound words to remind me to look to the present instead of worrying about the future.

I have also found it helpful to look at those who have come before me who have great wisdom. Occasionally, I read the works of great leaders, or read a biography about them, or watch a documentary about them. Their wisdom and their stories remind me of how we never face things alone in this life. Every person before us has experienced just as many defeats as they have victories. Their stories and counsel help us to see the world with new eyes.

In this case we also read of Daniel not being alone as three others around him are on the same journey. I have often found wisdom comes not only from our own ability to think and make decisions, but from also seeking those who we can share insights with and they share their wisdom with us. Wisdom may come with age, and yet there are many people who are also wise beyond their years. I am grateful for the many people I have in my life from those who are twice my age to those just a little older than me who are the

“big brothers” who help me figure out things and are supportive. The Lord didn’t just give Daniel wisdom; it was a gift to be shared among a group of believers.

How do you find practical wisdom for daily life in studying the Word? How do the stories of others give you insight and perspective into your own life? Who are the leaders you consider to be examples of wisdom? Who are the people who help you grow in wisdom and discernment? Why is it important to have others who help you grow in wisdom?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009