

Daniel 1: Living in response to a mystery...

Read Daniel 1

1. Daniel and many of the royal family were taken to exile in Babylon. Put yourself in their place, what is your response to your circumstances? What are you thinking and feeling?

This is simply a reflection question to get the conversation going and enter into the lived experience of the exiles so that the other questions can become a little more personal in nature. We could expect a spectrum of responses...

Anger at God for allowing this, anger at the Babylonians for the atrocities of war.

Sorrow for the way in which the nation sinned that brought this about.

Fear that they would never see home again, lose their life, never again do...

Hope that God would end their exile.

Who is God?

2. What do we learn about God from this opening chapter?

God is mentioned three times in this text with the same verb each time. God gave, gave, gave. God is graciously sovereign over all things.

Once you get into this the first act of God's sovereignty will probably make many uncomfortable as God gives Jerusalem into the hands of her enemies and all the violence and atrocities that would go along with that.

There could be the danger of getting sidetracked on that reality so as to miss the general teaching of the text but it would help to linger here a little – if it is brought up – so that you can address it in people's minds so they aren't distracted from the whole.

God promised exile if the people did not remain faithful to the covenant. They participated in the same injustices as their neighbours. They made alliances with Egypt which God told them not to do which angered the Babylonians and precipitated the attack. There is a picture of this mysterious interplay between human responsibility and God's sovereignty.

There is also the reality that exile had purpose. It brought Israel to repentance, to a recommitment to God and the justice and righteousness he had invited them to. It preserved a remnant such that when they returned to Jerusalem it was a different nation.

3. There is a mysterious interplay here between the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. God determines all things through our free choices. God is sovereign **and** we are responsible.

a) What are the impacts on our lives if we were to choose one truth over the other?

Fatalism – believing our decisions don't matter vs. humanism – believing we determine all things by our free choices. It might help to explore the different ways each conviction would impact us personally...

b) What are the impacts on our lives if we were to live in the mystery of both being true at the same time?

A new way to navigate suffering. I am responsible – so I fight against suffering wherever I find it. God is sovereign so I can accept that my circumstances can be used by God to shape me, change me.

A new power to forgive. We can't forgive because we believe that that person has ruined or is ruining our lives. They were yes responsible for the harm caused to us – but they can't ruin our lives because God is sovereign.

A new way to work through failure. We can take responsibility and acknowledge that in God's sovereignty our lives cannot be derailed from what God intends for us.

What lived response does this invite?

Read Jeremiah 29:3-7

4. How does God invite his people to live while exiled in Babylon?

To build homes and plant gardens – to be involved in the day to day workings of the culture, to be conversant with the surrounding culture.

To grow, marry, have children, to grow in their distinctiveness as the people of God.

To be engaged – to pray for and work toward the full flourishing of Babylon.

5. What does this invite from us as followers of Jesus in the city of Toronto?

Simply talk about each of these headings – conversant – distinctive – and engaged and what that means for us as followers of Jesus. There are no right or wrong answers here but I would encourage you to move the conversation along so that all three pieces of this are covered.

6. The last verse points to the future that God brings about through our true liberator Jesus – who frees captives, ends exile, opens up an entirely new future. How does knowing the future that God's gracious sovereignty is bringing about impact how we live?

It gives us a sense of what the future will look like – animating not only our responsibility to live in step with that future – but also our hope that that work is not in vain for it is part of what will be present in that future.

It means this does not rest on our shoulders, we don't do this in our own strength. We do this in God's power through the working of the Spirit.