

The DNA of a Godly Man – Life Traits in Daniel

Part 1 – Daniel’s DNA in Youth (Daniel 1)

Introduction

As believers, we have been called to a life of service – we are servants of the almighty King and are called to represent Him both in word and deed until He returns to judge and rule over His kingdom. As we struggle through the difficulties of living out this servanthood amidst a world that is currently subject to another king, it is easy to lose sight of our priorities. Compromise is a common way to deal with the conflict that results from living under a sovereign that does not recognize our King’s authority and purpose. However, there are those who appear to have the capability to stand and reflect the nature of our King rather than compromise it.

We often assume that they were born with it – a DNA of faithfulness. I would like to argue that we all have been born with it – at our 2nd birth, we were given the DNA by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the servant task appointed to us. Now, unlike biological DNA, which predetermines eye color, hair color etc., spiritual DNA must be exercised in order to function properly. It would be like having the DNA for blue eyes, but they become bluer if exercised on a regular basis.

The OT book of Daniel describes a man who from his youth to old age, exercised his spiritual DNA. The prophet Daniel lived and served amongst the most powerful and educated men in history and yet did so in a way that demonstrated his servanthood to God in every phase of life. In the next few sessions, I would like to note how he exercised this DNA and from that extract how we can be effective servants at every stage of life with the exercise of these same traits.

Note that as we look into Daniel’s experience, he always focused on 3 crucial traits:

- **D**ependence on God’s sovereignty
- **N**on-concession of God’s omnipotence
- **A**pplication of God’s holiness

As we examine them within the narrative of his life, we will see that just as we, he lived in a pagan society, governed and controlled by those whose allegiance was to themselves or to the god of this world. Yet, because of his commitment to exercising this spiritual DNA, he was the epitome of servanthood to his King by being powerful in his message and pure in his activities.

In order to help us identify with Daniel, we need to better understand the historical milieu in which he was asked to function. As we see the parallels, our personal application will be easier.

Babylon and Daniel 1

The example of Daniel's DNA is born out of a context that is every bit as complex as our daily lives. Daniel had to constantly contend with changing politics, career infighting, pagan social norms and compromise. Note just a few of the issues that enabled Daniel to demonstrate his God given DNA:

- International Status – Daniel 1:2 – Lord **gave** Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand
 - At the time of Daniel's birth (@620), the world powers were beginning to change. Assyria, who had controlled all the ANE for almost 100 years (730-625) was now weakened.
 - Babylon's new king Nabopolassar unites with the rising power to the north (Media) to begin taking back the empire of Babylon. Egypt attempts to aid their Assyrian overseer, fearing the Babylonians more, but are defeated at the major capital of Nineveh in 612.
 - Nabopolassar began his domination of the known world by moving across the fertile crescent to occupy Haran where Pharaoh Neco again came to aid Assyria, but was defeated. Neco, however, kills good king Josiah on his trip through Palestine to Haran.
 - In 605 crown prince Nebuchadnezzar leads the army back to Palestine to establish dominance in the major trade area of the world. After a victory at Carchemish, he comes to Jerusalem, but suddenly leaves to return home as his father had died and he must be there to be crowned king. He travels with a small group across the desert so as to not take much time but sends a group of select hostages from Jerusalem-including Daniel.
 - Over the next 42 years Nebuchadnezzar makes Babylon the center of world attention, as the greatest scholars, architects, and artists are accumulated (1:2b) and functioning here. Daniel is one individual at the crossroads of the world.
- Indebted Status – Daniel 1:3-4 – Daniel was taught the language and literature to serve
 - At this point, Judah is little more than a backwater vassal kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital. Although probably of royal blood, Daniel was essentially a "hillbilly", brought to the big city to be given a rare opportunity
 - His nation is now only in existence by the whim of Nebuchadnezzar and his life is only valued in what he can do for the king/kingdom of Babylon.
- Insubordinate Status – Daniel 1:5 – appointed king's ration of food and wine
 - Daniel is essentially a slave with the opportunity to do well, he has no rights and no ability to make demands
 - Defying the king's commands or reviling his standards is rebellion and punishable by imprisonment or death.

At this point, Daniel is a youth in the most powerful and prestigious capital in the world and about to begin service to its most intellectual and influential men. Note that it is now we see his DNA become apparent.

Dependence on God's Sovereignty

- Despite the seeming circumstance of Babylon's rule, Daniel knows that God is sovereign and all that takes place is under His control. Note the contrast between the king's assumption and Daniel's – vs 7 they set new names / vs 8 but Daniel set on his heart
- Daniel also understands that sovereignty is given by God to men. Note that he does not usurp that authority with brashness or disrespect – “sought permission”
- Note that whatever circumstance in which God has placed you, He is both sovereign and expectant that we be dependent – 1Cor 10:13-He will provide an escape!

Non-Concession of God's Omnipotence

- Knowing that God's sovereignty had put him in these circumstances, it must be God's omnipotence that would see him through – note that despite the grace and mercy vs 9 of Ashpenaz, he feared the wrong “lord” (note only 2 times Lord is used in Hebrew section 1:2)
- Again, Daniel seeks an answer that honors authority vs 11 – Ashpenaz would not, but the guardian/overseer was willing for 10 days – what did he get?? Maybe he ate their food??
- Daniel diet is not the point – God gave a miraculous response to proper obedience (12-16)

Application of God's Holiness

- Vs 8, note that this is not the common word for defile. It is much less used and has more of the meaning “unclean” not “unholy”. Note Nehemiah 7:64, Ezra 2:62 – unclean because they had no proper family registration in exile, or Isa 63:3 Messiah is stained with blood. Daniel wants to uphold every hint of holiness
- Note as stated above, if he is “unclean” in how he “keeps holy” what has he benefitted? God will provide a “holy” way out – which will not include “white” sins to avoid defilement
- The text does not tell us how Daniel was able to withstand these pressures at such a young age – however, under the rule of Josiah, he probably received good practical training.
 - Note in chap 2, when confronted with death unless they could reveal the dream and interpretation, Daniel again responds with God's sovereignty and omnipotence in mind—then goes directly to prayer!
 - Holiness in application is built on preparation – knowing, asking and trusting God!

Part 2 – Daniel’s DNA in Midlife (Daniel 4 with Psalm 119)

Introduction

Daniel wisely (Ezekiel 28:3) sets his heart early in life to grow his DNA. As fallible people, we have a tendency to start well and never finish. Many new year resolutions are already history. Many home projects and “important” programs lay gathering dust because of the tendency to begin, but fail to follow through. It is interesting that we are given very little regarding the middle age life of Daniel in biblical narrative. Daniel 4 is the most revealing and it is focused not on Daniel, but on Nebuchadnezzar. However, I believe that a case can be made that Daniel excelled in developing his DNA during this period as well.

ANE Chronology

(605-562) Nebuchadnezzar – 42 year reign – thus Daniel moves to midlife during his reign.

(562-560) Amel-Marduk / Evil-Merodach –son of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 52:31-33)

(560-556) Neriglissar - a general in Nebuchadnezzar’s army and son-in-law, killed Amel-Marduk to take the throne. Never mentioned in Scripture.

(556) Labashi Marduk – son of Neriglissar, reigned 2 months. Never mentioned in Scripture.

(556-539) Nabonidus – a high official under Nebuchadnezzar and Neriglissar, who usurped the throne. He was a devotee to his mother’s god, Sin and spent much time out of Babylon in Haran. Never mentioned in Scripture, but left his son Belshazzar as king in Babylon.

Daniel 4

Daniel 4 is submitted by Nebuchadnezzar as a testimony to his recognition of God’s sovereignty. From the data observed in the text, we can deduce that this is near the end of his rule as we see his pride swell because of the beauty of Babylon and his rule over it (4:30).

- Nebuchadnezzar campaigned early and built later. Note his palace is built late and:
 - Hanging gardens with special hoists to bring water from Euphrates
 - Double walled city with outer 17 miles, each wide enough to drive 2 chariots
 - Istar Gate had street the size of 10 football fields with enameled brick bearing images of lions, dragons and bulls.
- Note Daniel’s DNA is apparent even in the background
 - God is sovereign, so Daniel does not try to usurp the throne (4:36)
 - God is omnipotent, so Daniel does not seek attention but again responds in obedience and mercy to his authority (4:8, 4:19)
 - God is holy, so Daniel not only lives holiness but desires it for others (4:27)

Psalm 119:161-168 וַ/שׁ

While not conclusive, many biblical scholars believe that the internal evidence for Psalm 119 points to Daniel as the author. This massive **acrostic** highlights the Word of God as the supreme source from which the believer derives the ability to live righteously in a sinful world.

Note that within the Psalm, comments support Daniel as the man who fulfills each of these **and** had the ability to both write and secure this Psalm among the sacred writings:

- 119:9 – he made his way pure at a young age
- 119:98, 99, 100 – he is wiser than enemies/teachers
- 119:14, 72 – God’s word was valued above riches
- 119:46 – he spoke of God’s word before kings (plural)
- 119:54 – he was in a foreign land
- 119:23, 85, 161 – leaders plot against him or persecute him – “dug pits” may be literal?

It is likely that we see in this Psalm the work of a man who is in his prime and desires to encourage others to see the foundation for living a godly life in a pagan world. The וַ/שׁ stanza poetically demonstrates the DNA that Daniel lived out:

Dependence on God’s Sovereignty (161-163)

- Proper Fear
 - Leaders persecute without cause – שׂר is used most often as commander or leader – these are not who make him fear/tremble (פַּחַד a synonym of יִרְהָא) but has the idea of shaking or trembling in fear or awe. It is the Word of God.
- Proper Contentment
 - God’s Word is where his contentment lies – just as one would celebrate much free money – booty of war/spoil – that is his celebration.
 - God’s sovereignty means that whatever circumstance we know that it has both a purpose and a gracious outcome – reward may be delayed but is real
- Proper Principles
 - Falsehood - generic term for every type of deceit, fraud or wrong.
 - Hate and despise vs. love - Living in a world that is opposed to God’s sovereignty means we see falsehoods frequently. Those who live with a dependence on God’s sovereignty, hate acts that detract from a world where His values should have priority. The Psalmist sees these as contrary to God and thus in opposition to Him – God’s Word is to be loved by those who honor His right to rule.

Non-Concession of God’s Omnipotence (164-165)

- Divine praise
 - 7 times a day – not understood numerically, but as a completion, entirety – “all day long” I praise you.
 - לְעַלְמֵי עוֹלָם can be taken causally – because or on account of – praise comes from those who understand that God is all powerful, but remains righteous – thus, despite circumstances, God is worthy of praise because at any time, He may choose to act upon His righteous character and law.
- Divine peace
 - Literally “Peace, great, is to those who are loving your Law”.
 - Living in the light of God’s omnipotence gives great peace as nothing falls on us to “make it happen”. God controls, we are only called to be faithful / obedient.
 - Stumbling is also averted - by loving God’s law, we know what He desires and now walk with confidence that whatever occurs in life, He will control.

Application of God’s Holiness (166-168)

- Note that like the narratives in Daniel, the Psalmist first begins to think and prepare properly – knowing God and responding to His attributes by devotion to His Word, then allows that knowledge to influence his actions.
- The Psalmist responds with 3 actions which are based on 3 relations to God’s holiness:

Because:

I look for YOUR salvation

I do YOUR commands

I love (YOUR testimonies) exceedingly

My soul keeps YOUR testimonies (witness)

All my ways are before YOU

I keep YOUR testimonies and precepts (charges)

- God’s holiness should be reflected in his life because the Psalmist sees 3 truths
 - I owe Him my life because He has promised a full salvation
 - My relationship is one of love and thus desire to be like Him
 - My every action is seen by Him and thus I want to both reflect Him and obey Him

Part 3 – Daniel’s DNA in Advanced Age (Daniel 5-6)

Introduction

Many are familiar with the “story” of Daniel and the lion’s den, but few find true application because they fail to see the historical situation of this powerful narrative. Although the narrative of Daniel 5 (handwriting on the wall) is another great example of Daniel’s DNA, we will only touch on it to provide the background to our emphasis in Daniel 6.

- It has been over 23 years since the death of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel’s abilities have obviously been unused by the new rulers – note 5:10-12 where the “queen” must inform the king about Daniel (this was probably Nebuchadnezzar’s widow- the grandmother- as Belshazzar’s queens were at the banquet and the queen mother was probably with King Nabonidus in Tema).
- Daniel’s ability to accomplish the task asked of him put him in the worst possible position politically.
 - 5:29-as 3rd ruler in the kingdom – 1) Nabonidus who was absent, 2) Belshazzar, Daniel was thus representative of the kingdom that he predicted would fall
 - As a matter of ANE practice, the kings and nobles of the conquered kingdom were executed or imprisoned to demonstrate the power of the conqueror.
- Babylon was captured personally by one of Cyrus’ generals who died 3 weeks later. Many have confused the Darius of 6:1, with that general or with Darius the Great who came 16 years later. However, this Darius was made ruler (by Cyrus) and made appointments to govern the “western” portion of the new empire.
- Daniel again gains prominence as he is one 3 commissioners who control 120 satraps who govern all of what used to be the Babylonian Empire
 - Note that Jewish tradition states he had the scroll of Isaiah 45 with him to show Cyrus when he entered Babylon – probably contributing to the Jews return to build the temple and his own life
 - Note that he performs with the same level of competence with a new “regime”
- Daniel’s DNA is displayed in reverse order in this narrative as his enemies see his holiness and assume that they can change it. However, his holiness derived from a thought process that understood God’s omnipotence and sovereignty and thus did not waver!

Application of God's Holiness (6:4-5)

- No accusation could be made in the doing of wrong or lack of doing something – faithful
- His only “weakness” was in his obedience to his God
 - Note that they observed closely and did not find grounds to accuse
 - Note vs. 10 – he did not “start” when heard the law was signed but “continued”

Non-Concession of God's Omnipotence

- Daniel is never presented as angry or defensive over his unfair treatment vs 16
- Daniel appears to be willing to die, but note his speech – vs 21-22
 - He still speaks with honor to his superior
 - He understands that God can and does deliver – but waited for God's choice
 - He is also miraculously unharmed – at age @85 he could have died falling

Dependence on God's Sovereignty

- Again, Daniel's actions are prompted by a proper knowledge of God's sovereignty – note that as he is seen acting in Daniel 6, we have proof he is preparing in Daniel 9
 - He is studying Scripture regarding God's will for His people – specifically in Jeremiah 25:11 where 70 years are declared for their captivity
 - He is praying for forgiveness and for repentance of his people 9:3-4
- In prayer and study, he knows and holds to God's revealed plan
 - God will bring His people back because of His promise – Daniel has already seen the edict and probably would have loved to return, but must instead help them from his administrative position
 - Vs 18 – God's sovereign will to be compassionate is our only dependence, so we must acknowledge His right to act when and how He sees fit for His Name.

SO WHAT?

1. My circumstances are always known and planned by God – that brings peace
2. God can change those circumstances at any time – why is not the issue, faithfulness is!
3. Reflecting God in my life must be built on a relationship that knows who He is, who I am and what my role is! God is the controller, I am His servant, do what He asks in holiness