



Strangers in a Strange Land

Daniel 1

Strangers in a strange land. We all know what it's like to be in a strange place amongst strange people and feeling like a fish out of water. Everybody seems to know what they are doing – except us! If you travel abroad for your holidays you'll know just what I mean. EMPTY SEAFRONT Things look familiar, but you can't half make an idiot of yourself because you don't know the local ways or customs. And it can be a problem. The first few times we travelled to France we went on Saturday, only to find that the shops did not open again until Tuesday morning (most are shut Mondays!) Or the fact that in Spain outside the tourist season, shops and restaurants are closed by 8. A couple of years back we arrived in Spain in April, starving, and could not find anything to eat at 9 o'clock. Where do you get a meal in Spain at 10 at night in Spain in April. You can – if you drive all the way to the airport to their all night cafe! FRENCH MOTORWAY

We've become quite used to travelling abroad now queues at tolls can be enormous and we noticed at the first large queue that there was a little used set of booths with a sign that said just CB. Looking at the queue, I saw all the traffic waiting was foreign and all the cars going through the blue lanes were French. One of the problems being a stranger in a strange land – and lands don't come much stranger than France – is that you never know for sure what something is the first time you see it. I plucked up the courage and headed for the CB lane – caravan in tow - in the hope that the automated lane took what in France is known as a CB – a carte bancaire – a credit or debit card and that ours would work. And guess what? It worked perfectly and the automated machinery even recognised we had a caravan and charged us for that. Sadly most of our compatriots ended up in the huge queues all holiday because they paid in cash whilst we sailed through blue lanes. Perhaps we aren't true strangers in France any more.

TITLE SLIDE

Strangers in a strange land. Today's study from scripture involves the prophet, Daniel and his friends being put in a place they didn't really want to be – they were good Jewish boys, well versed in scripture and in the customs of the Jews were being made to learn the customs and religion of another people – something all Jews just hated.

BABYLON

In Babylon, they weren't where they wanted to be and they were being pushed into a mould that they didn't want to be pushed into. In one sense it was a huge privilege that the most powerful man in the world at that time, Nebuchadnezzar had chosen them as the cream of Jewish manhood to be developed into what were effectively the his empire's civil servants of the future. His intentions were more political than kind. He was there to take the cream of the nations he had conquered for the greater good of the empire. So, giving positions to people drawn from those nations rather than straight oppression meant that their cultures were absorbed into the empire along with their skills and technology. These people would be far less likely to rebel against him if his empire made them rich and influential.

But these guys first needed to be educated – or perhaps indoctrinated – with the Babylonian dream. They had to be prepared to serve him and his empire. So this guy Ashpenaz was given the job of teaching them. But it was pretty clear from the outset that being stripped of their Jewishness was not what Daniel and his friends had in mind.

TITLE SLIDE

Why do I say all this? Because so many of us spend the majority of our lives outside an environment we would call Christian. Usually it's because we work for a living but it could be that we are the only Christian in our household, or the only Christian in our circle of friends.

The problem for many Christians is that so often we see our spiritual life as church and the purposes of God only working out through church. So we see service for God as something we do in church,

prayer is something we do in our house-group, Bible study we do at home, witness is something we do through church. It's a well-known fact that most evangelical Christians – especially Pastors! - have few friendships outside their church circle. Take a moment to think and you'll see what I mean.

And worse, so many Christians see life outside church as just something they do. Yes, we'd like to do some kind of spiritual service but... "I've got my job", "I've got my family to think about" and all the rest of it.

So when I talk about Daniel and his friends, you understand how they were feeling. They were taken from their land and however much the honour it must have been – it wasn't what they would find ideal – no Temple, no scriptures, no worship and as we shall find, none of the food they were accustomed to. It was difficult, it was frustrating.

Now let's get to the crunch – CRUNCH – they were in Babylon because God wanted them to be there!

In a tough job where its difficult to be a Christian? Are you in a challenging family where you feel you struggle as a Christian? Wish you were somewhere else? I bet Daniel and co felt the same way – yet it was God who wanted them there because He had a purpose for them!

So what I want to encourage you with this morning if you feel that coming to church is what you live for, is that God has put you in your position, not to struggle, not to go under but to thrive in the way these four guys did in Babylon. What was the secret of their success?

◆ They acted with integrity

Daniel and his friends were in a bit of bother. The food they were asked to eat was rich food and all sorts – but it wasn't kosher meat and the wine wasn't kosher wine. To them it was unclean. Interestingly, the four in this story are only four of a number of Jews conscripted by Nebuchadnezzar for his charm school. These four were prepared to make a stand and not sell out their faith.

Many Christians find themselves in difficult jobs where dishonesty is a way of life. Many Christians are in marriages or families where life is full of pressures and contradictions because they are the only Christians. What do you do? Do you sell out? Or do you make a stand. Daniel and his fiends made a stand and sought to act in a way which both recognised their faith in God and recognised their duty to King Nebuchadnezzar. Yes, you can with God's wisdom do both. And God gave these men wisdom – and in abundance to do this. They honoured God and they were honoured by Nebuchadnezzar as men of wisdom and integrity.

You can either run with the pack, or be a stranger in a strange land.

◆ They respected the people they worked with

What was most significant about their integrity was they were prepared to respect Ashpenaz. A problem many evangelicals have is that they thing unbelievers in some way below them. Uh- huh – bad thinking. The only difference between me and your average unbelieving person in Felixstowe is the blood of Christ. I am as undeserving as the next man – yet I'm a son of God – not because of my goodness but because of Jesus. How dare I disrespect others whom I wish to come to Christ. That's bad. But I've known of many Christians who cut themselves off morally from their workmates and have made their stand whatever and have been proud to feel like a martyr when people shun them because they are a religious wierdo.

Daniel and his friends respected Ashpenaz and suggested a compromise that would satisfy their conscience and get Ashepenaz out of a quandary that he was in. Hal believed that if they became teetotal vegetarians (which dealt with their eating habits) that they would become weaklings and he would get the chop (literally) from Nebuchadnezzar for allowing them to be veggies. They respected that and offered a trial. Of course the trial was successful – what a great advert for vegetarianism – and for three years they were veggie without adverse effect.

The advice – be creative in how you express your faith in situations where you are around unbelievers. Always act with integrity – but respect those you want to see come to Christ. It's obvious if you think about it. We have a God who gives us minds to be creative and opens ways where there seem to be no ways when we act with integrity and show the love and respect unbelievers deserve as we seek to reach them. It can work, it does work and it does make a

difference to people's lives.

◆ God honours those that seek His will in every situation

Simple as that. In honouring God and respecting people, these guys rose to where God wanted them to be – at the top of their professions. Leaders in government. Daniel survived three empires! Why? Because he honoured God, so God was able to use him. He wasn't a great church leader, built he was a competent secular politician, he wasn't a great teacher, but he was a faithful prophet and a confidant not of the religious folk, but of secular kings – people who were movers and shakers in empire. Why? Because He understood the role God had given him.

So what do you learn. First of all, that it is not sinful to be successful in a career – God may want you to be a mover and shaker which helps people, honours Him and brings others to Christ. You are not a reduced value Christian for having a career which occupies your time. You honour God wherever He places you. You are not diminished by not being as active in the church as people who have more time on their hands to do it. You have a calling – take it seriously.

◆ God does things in His time

So Daniel and his friends were in the court of Nebuchadnezzar and began to see the purposes of God working in their lives. But Babylon wasn't built in a day as it were. Their training with Ashpenaz took three years. All had careers in government – Daniel's very long indeed. It could be that you do not see much impact for yourself in your job. Maybe you can't see much product for your witness and prayers in your family. But God has placed you there – learn to do things in His time. You are in the front line of being witnesses for Christ and it may take you a lifetime to see some product – perhaps never in your lifetime or in your job. But God can use you to make a difference in people's lives if you let Him use you. Some of you are in jobs where your actions literally can make a difference to someone's life. Don't just see that as your job – see that as your calling – God's calling and don't be afraid to look for God in it, to see God in it and bless people through it.

Prayer

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Scripture Quotes TEV*

And outside of that church

Start where God has put people
because:

- they see the problems
- the church thinks they have problems and should be elsewhere
- but that is where God has placed them NOW with all the challenges and opportunities there are
- that's where God wants to do the miracles in their lives NOT the church because that is where they are most powerless.

- but that's where God wanted them to be and these men, particularly Daniel were to have a major influence on the societies of three great empires as a result!

Resolutions by Jonathan Edwards:

"Resolved: that all men should live for the glory of God.
Resolved second: that whether others do or not, I will."

1 In the third year that Jehoiakim was king of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia attacked Jerusalem and surrounded the city.[↗]

[1.1: 2 Kgs 24.1; 2 Chr 36.5-7](#)

2 The Lord let him capture King Jehoiakim and seize some of the temple treasures. He took some prisoners back with him to the temple of his gods in Babylon, and put the captured treasures in the temple storerooms.[↗]

[1.2-4: 2 Kgs 20.17-18, 24.10-16; 2 Chr 36.10; Is 39.7-8](#)

3 The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief official, to select from among the Israelite exiles some young men of the royal family and of the noble families. 4 They had to be handsome, intelligent, well trained, quick to learn, and free from physical defects, so that they would be qualified to serve in the royal court. Ashpenaz was to teach them to read and write the Babylonian language. 5 The

king also gave orders that every day they were to be given the same food and wine as the members of the royal court. After three years of this training they were to appear before the king. 6 Among those chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all of whom were from the tribe of Judah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 8 Daniel made up his mind not to let himself become ritually unclean by eating the food and drinking the wine of the royal court, so he asked Ashpenaz to help him, 9 and God made Ashpenaz sympathetic to Daniel. 10 Ashpenaz, however, was afraid of the king, so he said to Daniel, "The king has decided what you are to eat and drink, and if you don't look as fit as the other young men, he may kill me."

11 So Daniel went to the guard whom Ashpenaz had placed in charge of him and his three friends. 12 "Test us for ten days," he said. "Give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare us with the young men who are eating the food of the royal court, and base your decision on how we look."

14 He agreed to let them try it for ten days. 15 When the time was up, they looked healthier and stronger than all those who had been eating the royal food. 16 So from then on the guard let them continue to eat vegetables instead of what the king provided.

17 God gave the four young men knowledge and skill in literature and philosophy. In addition, he gave Daniel skill in interpreting visions and dreams.

18 At the end of the three years set by the king, Ashpenaz took all the young men to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them all, and Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah impressed him more than any of the others. So they became members of the king's court. 20 No matter what question the king asked, or what problem he raised, these four knew ten times more than any fortune teller or magician in his whole kingdom. 21 Daniel remained at the royal court until Cyrus the emperor of Persia conquered Babylonia.

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia ^[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility- 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ^[b] 5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your ^[c] food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.