

MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE BODY POLITIC: EXAMPLES FROM DANIEL'S INVOLVEMENT IN AFFAIRS OF STATE

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Daniel was destined for court politics. As he grew up in the royal surroundings of Jerusalem, however, he probably never dreamed as a boy that he, a prince in Judah, would serve his whole life in the courts of Babylon and Persia.

When they were carried captive to Babylon, Daniel and his friends had to make decisions about what ways and how much they would cooperate with their new masters. Babylon was no friend to the true God and was openly antagonistic to Daniel's values and religious practices.

We may learn some lessons for our time from the example of Daniel's involvement with the "powers that be."

God Can Raise Up Godly Leaders

Not all politicians are crooked. Still, some Christians believe that people of faith should not pursue positions of secular leadership. They say that politics by nature requires compromise. Besides, there is so much temptation in the public arena that one may enter public service as pure as the driven snow only to run the risk of being personally and publicly corrupted.

The fact remains, however, that through church history and sacred history God's good providence has raised up many of His people to serve His purposes in the sphere of government.

God Raises Up Heroes to Look after His Own

Like Queen Esther "for such a time as this" or Joseph whom He positioned in Pharaoh's court "to save much people alive," God placed Daniel in high positions of influence so that he could protect the interests of His captive people in Babylon. For example:

- God used Daniel to preserve life when all the wise men, including the Jewish apprentice wise men, fell under Nebuchadnezzar's sweeping sentence of death (chapter 2).
- More particularly, Daniel is called out of retirement to serve as one of three presidents in the new Persian regime that had just overthrown Babylon (chapter 6). This was a crucial period for setting the course of the new rule in relation to God's people. It is possible that Daniel used his position to gain access to Emperor Cyrus to intercede for the captive Jews. He knew that the appointed 70 years of captivity had now run its course,¹ and he may have turned Cyrus' attention to the sacred prophecy of Isaiah that predicted Cyrus' role in rebuilding Jerusalem.²

Believers Should Engage the “Powers that Be”

As a stranger in a strange land, Daniel could have tried to avoid encounters with his pagan overlords. Some of us might stick our head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich, or try passive resistance. Others might get aggressively fanatical. But notice the following:

- Rather than going on a hunger strike, Daniel and his friends did not refuse all of the king’s provision (chap. 1).
- Rather than going on a sit-down strike, Daniel determined to make the best of his assignment as an apprentice wise man. When God gave His leading about Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, Daniel did not hesitate to give God glory³ when he shared the interpretation with the king.
- Rather than calling for a violent coup against the wicked Emperor Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel prayed for his security while also calling for his personal repentance.⁴ In this way we too promote domestic tranquility by praying for the well-being of those in authority.⁵

Daniel Himself Set the Terms of Engagement with Secular Powers

It would have been easy for Daniel and his friends to take the path of least resistance. But they had to answer to God and live with their consciences. The only safe recourse would be to “obey God before men.”⁶

When godless powers made benign demands on them, Daniel and his friends would respond with diligence. But when demands were made that might compromise them, the Hebrews often responded with a reasonable counter-proposal. At times they were forced to disobey unjust decrees, but in doing so, they tried to avoid reactionary fanaticism. Consider the following:

- Daniel and his friends made the best out of a difficult situation by proposing a simple diet of vegetables and water. This called for personal sacrifice, but it avoided the meats and drinks offered to pagan gods, while enabling them to keep a kosher diet (chap. 1).
- When offered rewards for interpreting the hand-writing on the wall, Daniel told Belshazzar to keep his gifts for himself (chap. 5).
- When the Hebrews were inadvertently (chap 3) or deliberately (chap. 6) placed under strictures of improper religious observance, they did not over-react, even though obedience to God would mean death at the hands of unjust men. Daniel’s friends did not incite a riot at the sound of the band calling for obeisance to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue. Daniel himself did not change from his thrice daily prayers by closing his apartment windows nor by prostrating himself in the street. Even under personal threat he followed his routine religious duties in his routine manner.

God Raises Up Leaders to Bring Messages of Hope

Daniel was happy to use his position to do good unto all men,⁷ and especially to those of the household of faith.⁸ Leaders can lead away from God, or they can restrain evil and lead toward godly virtues. Not only do their policies impact the lives of their subjects, but their pronouncements and speeches can leave a lasting influence beyond the contemporary generation.

God spoke through Daniel as a leader to give comfort in the present and hope for the future.

- Daniel should have been retired by the third year of Cyrus. After years of service, he was pushing age 80 in the year 537. Yet he seems to be traveling near the Tigris River, probably on a diplomatic embassy, when God reveals the messages of Daniel 11 & 12 to him. These prophecies give detailed predictions of near-term events⁹ as well as a message of resurrection and future rewards for the persevering righteous ones.¹⁰
- Daniel's message of hope in chapter seven reminds us that no matter how dark the night, the final triumph must come through the Son of Man when he brings in His glorious kingdom.¹¹

Conclusion

Daniel's life and message teach us that believers do not have to hide from the world or the issues of our generation. Rather, we can and should be engaged with the policy makers of our governments. Some of us like Daniel and Joseph may be called upon *to be* policy making leaders.

In all of our political involvement we will operate within the guidelines of the whole counsel of God. Our chief motive will be to bring glory to God as we strive to bring "...captive every thought to the obedience of Christ..."¹² Ultimately, active Christian involvement in the affairs of state will tend toward domestic tranquility for the church and all of society.

Christians are citizens of heaven first. Daniel teaches us that we must also be good citizens in the world.

¹ Jer. 25:11, 12.

² Is. 44:28 – 45:4.

³ Dan. 2:19-23, 28.

⁴ Dan. 4:19, 27.

⁵ 1 Tim. 2:1, 2.

⁶ Acts 5:29.

⁷ In intervening for the lives of the other wise men (2:24) and in wishing the king well (4:19).

⁸ Gal. 6:10.

⁹ First half of chap. 11.

¹⁰ Chap. 12.

¹¹ Dan. 7:13, 14, 27.

¹² 2 Cor. 10:3-5.