

The Dispersion

Daniel 1:1-16

- *Introduction*

- There is a tension between the early church we find in the books of the New Testament and our American churches. We feel it as we read books like 1 Peter, written to those who are being tortured and killed for their confession of Christ—our faith was forged in suffering while we live in relative comfort. How do we even understand, much less live out the faith of the martyrs in our time, in this place? Daniel is an example. Babylon laid herself before him, and yet he wasn't satisfied and longed for another kingdom. The finest food was worthless to him, because he valued the presence of God more. May we have such strong desires for the kingdom of God that the best of this world will not satisfy us. May we share in the singular joy of those who suffer, and in so doing, share in their faith.

- *Discussion Questions*

- Read Daniel 1:1-16
- Faithful foreigners live in the name of Jesus
 - Daniel didn't eat the King's food because of eating restrictions in the Old Testament Law. How does this relate to us today? Who are the kings in our lives, and what do they offer to us to eat that we should reject?
 - Both Peter and James talk about the Christian Church in terms of the dispersion we see here in Daniel, when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and carried her people into various parts of the empire. Why would Peter and James make that comparison, and what can we learn from this comparison about how we should live today?
 - When Daniel and his friends refuse the king's food, they grow physically stronger than the other people in captivity. Does following God lead to better health? Does following God give us better lives or make us better people?
- A different way of living in the world flows from a new identity in God
 - Daniel and his friends were given new names by King Nebuchadnezzar, but refuse to use their new names. How does the world try to change the names of Christians today? How do we keep our Christian name? How can the church help us in this task?
 - We may not spend a lot of time sitting and thinking about our identity, but we do spend a lot of time defining ourselves to others. What are some ways we define ourselves to

other people, and what does this reveal about how you think of yourself? What would it look like to define yourself primarily as a Christian?

- What are some ways people go wrong in defining and presenting themselves as Christians? What temptations or mistakes lie behind these pitfalls?
- If we feel convicted that our identity isn't rooted in Christ, how, practically, do we go about changing how we define ourselves?

- *Leader Guide*

- Daniel is a prophet of the dispersion, and as such, Christians should find some affinity, since Peter and James both write to New Testament Christians as those who are in the dispersion, the elect exiles. We are exiles in many ways, since we are a part of a kingdom that is disbursed throughout the world, separated from our people and living amongst peoples serving the very powers who would see us conquered. Even though Christians in many places, very much including the United States, have mingled nationalism with religion, Daniel gives us an example of someone who lives as though he is yearning for his true nation and home. Daniel is a model to us of living a faithful life in a foreign land.
- The treatment of Daniel and his friends by the empire should be a cautionary tale to Christians, if we take seriously our status as exiles. The empire doesn't treat them cruelly, as we might expect from the enemies of God's people, and quite the opposite. Daniel and his friends are given the finest of everything in the empire, even what the king eats and drinks, and raised in peace without fear or care. All of this while Babylon ravages their homeland again and again, murdering their kinsmen and systematically destroying their culture. This is how sin works in our lives and communities as well; lulling us to sleep is easier than pinning us to the ground, but the result is the same. To often, the enemy gives us everything we could want in hopes that eventually our present destruction and captivity would begin to seem far-off, and our desire and devotion for the kingdom of God would wane in the comforts of the kingdoms of this world.
- We see, in this passage, Daniel rejecting the meat and wine given to him by the king. This is often misconstrued to glorify vegetarianism or t-totaling, but we get a good clue of Daniel's motivations in verse 8, when he asks the eunuchs to allow him not to "defile himself." Daniel rejects the meat and wine from the king's table, not because it's wrong to eat meat or drink wine, but because he thought it would make him unclean according to the law, from which we can gather that the meat and wine from the king's table weren't kosher, and were likely used in worship of the gods of Babylon. This is not a rejection of certain foods as much as it is a refusal of even subtle ways of bowing down to other gods.