



SERVING ... WHEN YOU JUST DON'T GET IT

Who here has ever felt lost? Found themselves in unfamiliar territory? Been led astray by the sat nav / blue dot? (Or blamed it at least?) How did it make you feel?

The reality is: life itself can seem like that sometimes. Like you've followed the instructions as best you can, and still ended up in a very confusing place.

The good news is: biblical heroes experienced that, too. And that includes the hero of this particular book: the prophet Daniel.

Daniel 8

As we saw in ch2, Daniel chs2-7 are written in Aramaic, the language of Persia. And this forms a symmetrical structure or chiasmus (from the Greek *x* or *khi*), like this:

Vision of a 4-sectioned statue
Testing of the 3 friends
Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar
Humbling of Belshazzar
Testing of Daniel
Vision of 4 terrifying beasts

And this is a narrative in itself. The world is in turmoil; God's people will be tested; but in the end, God's enemies will be humbled, and we will be victorious.

But once we get to ch8, the language reverts back to Hebrew. And we get a vision, given to Daniel during the third year of King Belshazzar, which leaves him very, very confused.

What Daniel experiences on a spiritual level is what his people are going to experience, on a physical level. 3 situations we might all be able to relate to, at some point:

1) "I don't get where God has put me." Daniel's vision is where? Not by the river Euphrates, near the city of Babylon – where Daniel lives and works – but 200 miles east of that, by the Ulai canal near the citadel of Susa. So, his first thought is undoubtedly, "What am I doing here?"

What's true for Daniel in his vision, and for Israel later, can also be true of us. Why has God put me here? In this office or factory? This classroom or lecture hall? This street or neighbourhood? This waiting room or doctor's surgery? Even this church or ministry?

What Daniel didn't know is that Susa was destined to become the capital of the mighty Persian Empire. Equally, you might not always understand why you are, where you are. But God's vision extends further than yours, by some way! He has put you there, for a reason.

The important thing is to know where you are with *Him* (e.g. Psalm 91:1-2). And that nothing can change that.

2) "I don't get what God has told me." God speaks to Daniel in 2 ways here: through pictures, and words:

- **Pictures.** Daniel has a vision of 2 animals: a powerful 2-horned ram, with one horn more prominent than the other, who bullies his way into the north and west and south; and a 1-horned goat, from the west, who succeeds in overpowering him. The horn on the goat is then broken off, 4 replace it, and eventually a little horn appears, a mean horn who attacks the stars, stops sacrifices, and opposes 'the Ruler', for 2300 evening and morning sacrifices (or 3½ years, accounting for 1-sacrifice sabbaths and feast days).
- **Words.** Daniel doesn't understand, so an angel explains it: the 2-horned ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire, with the Persians more dominant. The 1-horned goat is the Macedonian Empire, headed by Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persians all the way to India before dying of boredom. The 4 horns are his top generals – Lysimachus, Cassander, Seleucus, Ptolemy – who carved up his empire; and the little horn is Antiochus IV, the Seleucid king who would oppress Israel before God finally took him out.

Like Daniel, we can sometimes fail to get what the Bible is saying; other times, we can simply not like it. As Mark Twain once said, "It's not the bits of the Bible I don't understand that bother me; it's the bits I do understand." We might see the Bible as some kind of glorified meme generator, and instead get rules / challenges / warnings. But the Bible is God's intercom to the world. Our job is to listen, pray, and act.

3) "I don't get why God has left me." What really rocked Daniel was this reality: that even once his people were back in the land, things were going to be tough. For 2 centuries the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt would be at each other's throats, with Israel stuck in the middle; and eventually, the Seleucid king Antiochus IV would outlaw the Jewish faith, desecrate the temple in Jerusalem, and slaughter thousands.

And the point is: you can feel as if you're in exile even when you're not; and feel as if God is distant, even when He isn't.

We need to remember that God's plans are bigger than ours, and God's kingdom is bigger than ours. And life's challenges are not a sign that God has abandoned you. If anything, they can be a sign that God is present *with* you (hence Jesus' words in Matthew 5:11-12).

And whether you realise it or not, He is using *this* – and your response to it – to further His purposes.

Go About The King's Business

Here's what Daniel didn't know: the Persian Empire was about to conquer Babylon and allow Israel to return to their homeland. 2 centuries later, the Greek Empire would conquer the entire Middle East but also provide a universal language whereby everyone could understand each other. And 3 centuries after that, the successor states would become so divided the Romans would have to take over, and bring stability to the Mediterranean.

All of which paved the way for? The Gospel.

But Daniel didn't know this. So how does he deal with his "I don't get it" moment? He takes some time-out (because yes, even heroes of faith can struggle). But then this:

"I got up, and went about the King's business."

In a way, that means he got on with life. But I think there's more being suggested here. Daniel is going about the ultimate King's business: he's serving the King of the Universe.

It's natural to ask "Why am I here? What is God saying to me? Why has God abandoned me?" But the better questions are: "How does God want to use me here? What does God want to say through me? How does God want to make His presence felt, in me?"

Whether we get Him or not, may we all go about the King's business, this week. Let's pray.