



THE BOOK OF
D A N I E L

*The Most High
God rules over
the kingdoms of
the world and
appoints anyone
he desires to
rule over them.*

(Dan 5:21b NLT)

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Daniel and His Friends Taken into Exile (1:1-7)

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 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.

Daniel and His Friends Taken into Exile (1:1-7)

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. (NIV)

^{1:1} 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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. (ESV)

- The Book of Daniel **opens** with **two** succinct statements about the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.
 - The **first** statement describes the event in terms of **secular history**
 - The **second** statement describes the event in terms of **biblical theology**.
- These two perspectives are woven together throughout the book:
 - Man is active in history: “*Nebuchadnezzar... came to Jerusalem and besieged it*” (v. 1).
 - Yet God is **also** active in the **same** historical events: “*And the Lord gave Jehoiakim... into his hand*” (v. 2).
- In these opening verses, Daniel has clearly stated a **principle** that we see **throughout** the Scriptures – **even** when it is not explicitly stated.

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- These two statements describe two ways of looking at life.
- Life can be viewed simply in terms of what occurs. This is what we commonly call “history.”
- Christians, however, are interested in far more than the **when** or the **who** or the **what** of history.
- Christians are concerned to know **why** things happen and **how** those things relate to the **purposes of God**.

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- So, **why** did Jehoiakim knuckle under to Babylon and **why** were the temple vessels pilfered?
- Daniel **tells** us why: “*the Lord gave* Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar’s] *his hand*”.
- The conquest of Judah was not **merely** the inevitable result of Babylon’s **military** might.
- No, the Lord **gave** Jehoiakim up to Nebuchadnezzar.
- And so right at the beginning of Daniel’s book we are told that Israel’s God is the Lord who directs history **as he wills**.

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- Furthermore, we see in this text a sovereign God who is **faithful** to keep his word.
- In giving up Judah to Babylon the Lord is simply being true to the warnings that he has given in the past.
- From the very beginning, the LORD had spelled out the **blessings** and **curses** of the covenant that he made with the nation of Israel.

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- The LORD had repeatedly warned Israel that if they rebelled against him he would scatter them among the nations and leave them to rot in their enemies' lands:
 - ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.... ¹⁵ if... you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, ¹⁶ then... ¹⁷ ...you shall be struck down before your enemies.... ³⁸ And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. ³⁹ And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity. (Lev 26:13-17; 38-39)

1:1 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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. (ESV)

- Nearly 100 years **prior** to this siege that is spoken of in our text (around 705 BC), Isaiah had **severely criticized** King Hezekiah for making an alliance with Babylon in order to ease his problems with Assyria:
 - Isaiah says to Hezekiah: *Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD.* ⁷ And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be *eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.* (Isaiah 39:6-7)

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- When the reign of Jehoiakim **himself** is assessed from a prophetic standpoint, we are told “he did evil in the sight of the LORD his God” (2 Chr. 36:5), and the inevitable consequence was judgment.
- The author of 2 Kings writes: “Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh [the rot did not begin with Jehoiakim], according to all that he had done, ⁴ and also for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon.” (2 Kings 24:3-4).

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- God is faithful to His word—always—no matter what the consequences for Himself or for His people.
- He is faithful in the **blessings** He sends, but He is no **less** faithful in chastisement and judgment.
- The siege of Jerusalem and its terrible consequences was undeniable proof that God does what He has promised.
- But, having said that, God's **ultimate** purpose here was **not** judgment but rather **mercy**.

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- Babylon was to be the scene of Daniel's lifelong service in the kingdom of God and the sphere in which he would demonstrate what it means to “*sing the LORD'S song in a foreign land*” (Ps. 137:4).
- In fact, the reason Daniel was **able** to do that so well is revealed in these opening words that set the scene of the entire book.
- Daniel **knew** that if he was in a foreign land, it was **because** of the hand of the Lord.
- **Nothing** that occurs in the life of God's children is accidental or incidental – it is **all** a part of God's sovereign purpose.

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- Verse 2 tells that “*the Lord gave*” Nebuchadnezzar “*some of the vessels of the house of God And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god*”
- The deportation of these “*vessels*” [i.e. articles, sacred objects] to the “*land of Shinar*” has ***theological*** significance.
- “*Shinar*”, i.e., Babylonia (the southeastern part of modern Iraq), was the site of the tower of Babel (Gen. 10:10; 11:1–9), and thus the place of man’s initial corporate rebellion against God.
- In fact, from Genesis to Revelation, Babylon was synonymous with opposition to God, a symbol of darkness and the anti-kingdom forces of evil.
 - *Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.* (Rev 18:2)

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- In the ancient world, wars were usually fought in the name of some god, and therefore the **plunder** of war was thought to belong to the god whose army was **victorious**.
- Consequently, in the minds of people living in **Daniel's** day, the deportation of these sacred objects from the Jewish temple would have been seen as a victory of the Babylonian god Marduk over Yahweh, the God of the Israelites.
- But those of us who know and serve the sovereign God of Daniel know that “*the Lord gave*” these sacred objects to the Babylonian captors in order to accomplish his sovereign purposes.
- And so we see that the “captive” God controls and manipulates his “captors” and when the course of Israel’s exile is complete, he will restore what is rightfully his!

^{1:3} Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his *chief eunuch*, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the *royal family and of the nobility*, ⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. (ESV)

- Daniel now begins to tell the story of how he and his three friends were taken to Babylon as captives.
- According to Josephus, “*the king*” (Nebuchadnezzar) had to make a hurried trip home to Babylonia after his recent conquest in Egypt in order to deal with some problems.
- So, he sent orders to “*Ashpenaz*”, his “*chief eunuch*”, to bring back to Babylon (from Judah) an elite group who were to be chosen from among the “*royal family and of the nobility*” of Judah.

^{1:3} Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility,⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. (ESV)

- In addition to being a part of the Judean royalty/nobility these men had to be:
 - “*youths*” – The term can refer to a child, but in this context probably was understood to be young men between 14 and 20 years of age.
 - “*without blemish*”
 - “*of good appearance*” – In the ancient world, beauty was regarded almost as a virtue.
- These young men not only had to be good-looking and well-born, but they had to be men who showed intellectual aptitude:
 - *skillful in all wisdom* – not just idle dreamers or theorists
 - *endowed with knowledge* – i.e., possessed a wide range of knowledge
 - *understanding learning* – possessing “unusual understanding”
- And finally, they had to be “*competent to stand in the king's palace*” – i.e. able to serve.

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- Having met these qualifications, those who were selected, were to receive training in the “*literature and language of the Chaldeans*”.
- The “*Chaldeans*” were the nation’s old ruling class, and in this context it probably refers to the Babylonian wise men.
- They would learn to read, write and speak like Babylonian wise men.
- Their native texts and tongue would now take second place.
- These captives would have lots of old literature to learn.

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(ESV)

- Their study would have included polytheistic literature in which magic, sorcery, charms and astrology played a prominent part.
- Though these things had long been banned in Israel (Dt. 18:10–12; cf. 1 Sam. 28:3ff.), Daniel voices no objection in this account to having to learn about such things.
- These young men from Jerusalem's court needed to be **secure** in their knowledge of Yahweh to be able to study this literature objectively without allowing it to **undermine** their faith.
- In order to witness to their God in the Babylonian court they had to understand the cultural presuppositions of those around them.

⁵ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. (ESV)

- There was precious little that they were not expected to do for the king, but this demanding profession gave them social prestige and other benefits.
- As we see here the king provided them with “*a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank*”.
- Candidates had three years of thorough preparation.
- Then after this they were to stand in the presence of the king, which means they would do **whatever** he required **whenever** he required it.

^{1:6} Among these were *Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah* of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called *Belteshazzar*, Hananiah he called *Shadrach*, Mishael he called *Meshach*, and Azariah he called *Abednego*. (ESV)

- Having now provided us with the backstory to his captivity, Daniel now, for the **first** time, mentions his name and the names of his three friends, only to tell us that a **part** of the Babylonian attempt to **brainwash** their captives was to give them **new** names.
- Their Jewish names (and their meanings) are:
 - “*Daniel*” = God is my Judge
 - “*Hananiah*” = Yahweh is Gracious
 - “*Mishael*” = Who is what El (God) is?
 - “*Azariah*” = Yahweh has helped
- Their new Babylonian names (and their meanings) are:
 - “*Belteshazzar*” = may a god protect his life or may Bel protect the king (Bel was the wife of Marduk)
 - “*Shadrach*” = command of Aku (Aku was the Babylonian moon god)
 - “*Meshach*” = uncertain meaning; possibly, I am of little account or who is what Aku is?
 - “*Abednego*” = servant of Nego (another Babylonian deity), the shining one.

Closing Thoughts

- The treatment of Daniel and his three friends provides us with a picture of the world's strategy of spiritual reprogramming.
- The fundamental goal of the whole procedure was to obliterate all memory of Israel and Israel's God from the lips and the minds of these young men, and to instill into them a sense of total dependence on Nebuchadnezzar for all of the good things in life.
- Isn't this how Satan still operates today?
- He may violently persecute believers in some parts of the world, yet often he works more effectively by seducing and deceiving us into forgetting God and thinking that our blessings come from somewhere else.
- He wants us to forget the truths expressed in those Hebrew names, that God is our judge, as well as the one who shows us his grace.
- He wants us to forget the uniqueness of our God and the help that only he can provide.

Closing Thoughts

- He wants to control the educational process, so that our children grow up immersed in his worldview and his philosophy of life.
- If he can further instill in us a sense of dependence upon the material comforts that make up our way of life, or certain pleasures of this world that we have grown to love, then he can far more effectively draw us away from the Lord.
- His fundamental goal is always to obliterate our memory of the Lord, to reeducate our minds to his way of thinking, and to instill in us a sense that all of the good things in life come from the world around us and from the satisfaction of the desires of our own flesh.

Closing Thoughts

- Recognizing the *Babylonian* strategy helps us to see and evaluate the strategy of resistance formulated by the four young men.
- To be sure, they did not *outwardly* resist the Babylonian system.
- They did not refuse to work for the Babylonians, perhaps because they recognized the hand of God in their situation.
- They understood the word that the Lord gave through Jeremiah, that those whom he had sent to Babylon should labor there for the blessing of the place in which they found themselves (Jer. 29: 4– 7).

Closing Thoughts

- As far as possible these young men sought to work within the system in which they had been placed, being good citizens of Babylon as well as of heaven.
- They didn't kick against the challenging providence of God, but rather accepted it as their present calling, with all of its trials, pains, and limitations.
- This reminds us that our calling is not to form Christian ghettos that are isolated from the world around us.
- On the contrary, we should be active in pursuing the common good of the community in which God has placed us, whatever challenges may face us.

Class Discussion Time

- We saw in the first two verses of today's text that Daniel realized that ***nothing*** that occurs in the life of God's children is accidental or incidental – it is all a part of God's sovereign purpose.
- My wife and I recently watched a movie about a period of the life of C.S. Lewis (*C.S. Lewis Through the Shadowlands* 1986).
- *This film is about the agonizing spiritual crisis of C. S. Lewis when his wife died from cancer. The love, grief, pain, and sorrow were so shattering to Lewis that his basic Christian beliefs, magnificently communicated in his many books, were now called into serious doubt.*
- It was particularly painful to watch the way this film portrayed Lewis' response to this trying circumstance in his life, because Lewis did not have the degree of understanding of God's sovereignty that Daniel did.
- Do you share the understanding of God's sovereignty that Daniel did and if so, do you find that it helps you navigate the difficult seasons of your life?

Class Discussion Time

- We saw in our study of verse 4b that Daniel and his friends would have been exposed to a good deal of literature that advocated ideas that Old Testament teaches against.
- This would have included such things as: polytheism, magic, sorcery, charms and astrology.
- And we saw that these young men needed to be secure in their knowledge of Yahweh to be able to study this literature objectively without allowing it to undermine their faith.
- One of my commentaries made this observation: *“The wise person knows how to learn from the wisdom of other peoples without being overcome by it”* (Sam Storms citing Goldingay)
- Do you agree? Why or why not?

Class Discussion Time

- Can you imagine what it must have been like to be exiled from home to a foreign city, to be alone and scared, a long way from familiar surroundings?
- How would you cope in such a hostile setting? What truths could you cling to?
- Would you remain faithful to your former identity or simply be assimilated into your new surroundings?