

11.01.2020 FROM JERUSALEM TO BABYLON

“As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” Daniel 1:17

As we start our study of the book of Daniel let us remember to ask God daily to reveal Jesus Christ in the book of Daniel. Every chapter is full of references to Him who is the centre and fulfilment of all prophecy.

God’s Sovereignty

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. **And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.** Daniel 1:1, 2*

Right at the start of the book, God informs us that He is sovereign.

He has given the King of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Not only is the king of Judah given over to bondage, but God so completely abandons Jerusalem (for 70 years) as the seat of His government and worship, that the very vessels used in His worship are given into the hand of this heathen king. God had told Hezekiah (Isaiah 39:5) that some of his descendants would be taken captive to Babylon and be made eunuchs there.

God gave Daniel favour with the prince of the eunuchs.

Now **God had brought (gave) Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.** Daniel 1:11

God gave knowledge and understanding to Daniel and his four friends.

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Daniel 1:17

Even though pagan Babylon had captured Judah and its people, God is still in charge. He rules over the heathen as well as His people, whether faithful and unfaithful.

Here is the gospel of grace in Daniel chapter 1: *God gives.*

Faith under Pressure: change of names; change of culture

Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king’s descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king’s delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. Daniel 1:3-7

Here begins the plan of Nebuchadnezzar to use the best of the captives of Judah to promote and adorn the court of Babylon. He uses the children of the King and nobles of Judah (the godly seed); good-looking, unblemished, wise, knowledgeable, quick in understanding and with competence to serve at the court of the greatest King on earth. To this end he gave them three years of training in the language and literature of the Babylonians. These young men versed in the Hebrew language were now taught Aramaic, the international language of diplomacy and commerce. The wisdom component of the curriculum consisted of mathematics, astrology, and the interpretation of dreams. Divination and omen interpretation was also part of the curriculum.

He first changed their names (which reflected the God they worshipped) to names that honoured the gods of Babylon.

The practice of magic and divination is condemned in the Bible. The knowledge of magic is not specifically condemned. We will look at this issue in later chapters.

Resolution not to partake of the delicacies at the King's table:

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that **he might not defile himself**....So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Daniel 1:8-15

1. Please note that the issue was not primarily vegetarianism. The issue was **DEFILING** themselves with unclean foods and strong drink from the King's table (the word for 'wine' in this passage has a root meaning of bubbling and fermenting i.e. intoxicating drink).
2. The test was - would they disobey God's direct instructions for the sake of worldly advancement, or would they remain true to the word of God whatever the consequences? Daniel purposed in his heart to be loyal to the Word of God that he had learnt from childhood. All true obedience arises from the heart.

Daniel and his friends could have chosen to compromise as did other captives. They could have used human reasoning to say that they were captives and hence had to obey the king. (We hear it all around us today when men and women want to disobey God...*'but it is the law of the land'* they say). Or they could have compromised by saying that since they were loyal to God in their hearts, it didn't matter if they outwardly obeyed the dictates of the king. Or they could have excused themselves saying that since they were favoured by the King, their disobedience would not only cause inconvenience to them, but also have consequences for their brethren in captivity.

'Obedience to the word of God, faith in the living God and separation from the defilements of Babylon are the outstanding marks of these godly men. Such have the understanding of the mind of God, for we read, "As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams". It is true the Lord had given them into the hands of the king of Babylon, but this did not hinder His giving understanding of His mind and purpose to those who were faithful to Himself...These things are surely recorded for our instruction and encouragement. Like Israel of old, the Church has entirely failed as a witness for God during the absence of Christ. In consequence of this failure, the professing Church has become captive in religious corruption which God likens to Babylon.

But again, the Bible clearly indicates that, however great the failure, God will have faithful individuals — overcomers who again and again will find their faith severely tested. If, however, they purpose in their heart to *obey* the word of God, to walk *in faith* in God, and in *separation* from the defilements of the corruptions around, they will have *understanding* of the mind of God, and will be honoured of God as *witnesses* for Himself.' *H. Smith*

Unblemished and Wise

As for these four young men (children), God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Daniel 1:16

Because of their faithfulness to God, these four young men did not have to depend on the learning of the Babylonians. God Himself gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom. To Daniel was also given understanding in visions and dreams.

'In acquiring the wisdom of the Babylonians, Daniel and his companions were far more successful than their fellow students; but their learning did not come by chance. They obtained their knowledge by the faithful use of their powers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They placed themselves in connection with the Source of all wisdom, making the knowledge of God the foundation of their education. In faith they prayed for wisdom, and they lived their prayers. They placed themselves where God could bless them. They avoided that which would weaken their powers, and improved every opportunity to become intelligent in all lines of learning. They followed the rules of life that could not fail to give them strength of intellect. They sought to acquire knowledge for one purpose—that they might honour God. They realized that in order to stand as representatives of true religion amid the false religions of heathenism they must have clearness of intellect and must perfect a Christian character. And God Himself was their teacher. Constantly praying, conscientiously studying, keeping in touch with the Unseen, they walked with God as did Enoch. True success in any line of work is not the result of chance or accident or destiny. It is the outworking of God's providences, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and perseverance' *Prophets and Kings: p.486*

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord your God who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go. Isaiah 48:17

Final Exam

Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. Then the king [f]interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. Daniel 1:18-20

God is in control of history. Through four faithful young men, God revealed to the most powerful kingdom of the time that even though God's people were captive and their capital city and Temple in ruins, His wisdom and understanding is far above all earthly wisdom. Nebuchadnezzar was not the source of the health, wisdom and understanding of these four young Hebrews. They looked to God, their Creator and Sustainer for these things that the Babylonians prided themselves on being able to offer and ultimately, God was glorified through their faithfulness to Him. God does not only work FOR His people. He can do mighty works WITH a faithful people.

Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus. Daniel 1:21

So we come full circle. The chapter begins with an invading King (Nebuchadnezzar) who is allowed by God to destroy Jerusalem. It ends with a King (Cyrus) who liberates God's people and invites them to return to Jerusalem.

Conclusion:

In spite of the failure of Israel, God still reserves a faithful remnant of His ancient people and He does not leave Himself without a witness; further, the spirit of prophecy and understanding in the ways of God is found in this remnant.

The gracious ways of God with this remnant clearly prove that, however much God may have to chasten His people on account of their unfaithfulness; they are still the objects of His care.

Daniel and his three friends were called to be faithful to God in the midst of a worldly, idolatrous and corrupt court. They were overcomers. The world today is very similar to Babylon of old, with its perpetual self-exaltation, its lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). God calls each of us to be overcomers like Daniel and his friends - a witness to Him, to be faithful to His Word and His calling in the midst of a corrupt and idolatrous world.

"Become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life" Philippians 2:15

To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. Revelation 3:21