

“EXILED IN BABYLON.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Daniel 1:1-7

Prayer:

Holy Father, as we come to study another one of the books in your Holy Book, grant us divine assistance and wisdom that this not be an exercise in gaining knowledge, but of gaining wisdom and making progress in holiness, and all of this for your glory and our benefit. Amen.

Was Daniel a real person?

The book bears the name of Daniel, but it doesn't start out with Daniel's name the way other prophecies do.

Isaiah 1:1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Jeremiah 1:1-2 The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.

Every other book of prophecy begins with an identification of who wrote it. They almost all start with something like “The word of the Lord came to ...” But Daniel doesn't which causes some to call into question its authorship. For most Christians in the pews we take for granted that it's true and it's written by a prophet named Daniel.

But for scholars this is one of the most questioned and vigorously challenged books of the Bible. The book of Daniel has been in the critics den for well over a century and a half. Every aspect of it has been called into question, its author, its date, its purpose and language.

The bottom line is, their reasons are all built on unbelief. Because his prophetic visions are so historically accurate, they assume there was no way Daniel could have known what he prophesied beforehand, it had to all be after the fact, so instead of being written by Daniel during the Babylonian exile of 605 BC, they say it was written during Greek and Roman times around 250 to 165 BC.

Liberal scholars who don't accept divine prophecy can't believe it was written before those events even took place. To them Daniel is a legendary or fictitious figure and all his famous stories are just legends, like fairy tales. So they are saying it is only a book of history, looking back and recounting what has already happened.

But we are believers in a God who speaks and reveals His plans and His ways to His prophets. The book claims to be written during the Babylonian exiles. Chapters 7-10 mention Daniel's name several times as the one receiving the vision.

Furthermore, Jesus validates both Daniel's real historical existence and his spiritual vocation as a prophet who received divine revelation.

Matthew 24:15 So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

Finally, the book of Hebrews makes references to Daniel 3 and 6 and credits them to Daniel.

There is no compromise, no half way measure, either it is divine or it's a fiction, a lie, an impostor. (see Pusey).

We are told very little about Daniel. He is apparently part of some royal family (Daniel 1:3), some noble line. He and his friends are probably teenagers, 15 to 18. He lives through the entire 70 year exile to the beginning of the Persian king Cyrus, so to around 85 years of age. He appears to have been a strong believer from early in his life. He feared God from a young age.

He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but not as recognized a prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel. He is a man of remarkable character, of humility and integrity; a man who knows God intimately and to whom God reveals His secrets. Daniel is another visionary like John, a man who received revelations about the future. This is an utterly God-centered man with a completely God-centered worldview.

What was Daniel doing in Babylon?

Nebuchadnezzar wanted the best Israel had to offer. They had to be from the noble class, well placed; they had to be fine physical specimens, athletic, in shape; they had to be sharp intellectually, body and brains, good looking and smart; and they had to be socially comfortable in high society, even in the courts of kings. They could think and talk.

Basically, they raided Jerusalem High School and got the student body president and the quarterback and captain of the football team and the valedictorian. The cream of the crop.

Nebuchadnezzar employs several tactics to conform the Jewish population to his will.

First, isolation from Jerusalem and isolation from their worship. He separated them from worship and from the preaching of the Word of God and from fellowship with God's people and from influences that produce godliness.

Second, indoctrination in Chaldean literature, worldview, culture, retraining minds to think in different ways. Give them an ungodly worldview and they will forget about God and forget about the fear of God.

They were selected to be immersed in Babylonian culture. They would learn Aramaic, the language of Babylon. They would learn Mesopotamian literature, astronomy, mathematics and medicine. Remember the magi, the wisemen from the east. No doubt there was training in astrology; and also dreams and dream interpretation.

What would the purpose of that be? To replace Scripture as their worldview perspective, to get them to accept another source of wisdom, to get them to accept other theories.

Third, compromise through Babylonian pleasures and high living, blunting the senses. They would receive the best that Babylon had to offer, they would be lavished with the same food and drink the king had.

What would the effect of that be? To become accustomed to a life of dependence on a new master. No suffering makes us soft. By the end of the three year, they would be fully indoctrinated and initiated into Babylonian culture and they would be Nebuchadnezzar's servants.

Nebuchadnezzar doesn't intend to win just by military conquest, he wants their hearts and minds. If he could win over Judah's brightest and best, certainly the rest of the Jews would follow.

Nebuchadnezzar is not some kind, generous person. He has a selfish motive, an evil intention, to turn these young boys away from their culture, to get them to deny your own heritage and culture and become Chaldeans.

Does that sound familiar to you? It's what has been happening to Christians in the United States, we are indoctrinated with a secular worldview, evolution, abortion, sexual freedom, increasing dependence on the government as they take over more and more, like healthcare.

This is Satan's scheme. To get us to slowly forget God and think all our blessings in this life come from us and our own efforts or from the government. He wants us to forget that our name is Christian and forget that God is our God. Satan wants us to be comfortable and to come to depend on our comforts.

Luxuries, ease, comfort, convenience, plenty, excess are all intoxicating. They make us soft and easy to be manipulated. How many of us have compromised with the riches and pleasures of this world?

How many of us have faced pressures to compromise, cut corners, cheat, lie, fudge the numbers?

We face temptations to commit small sins, private sins, sins maybe no one will know about.

There are appropriate ways to learn a new language and culture.

Jeremiah 29:4-7 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Some of you emigrated here from Holland, you worked hard to learn the new language, the new ways, the new culture. But one thing you all did was keep your Dutch Reformed heritage, your deeply rooted Reformed Protestant faith. You kept your spiritual identity.

As our children and grandchildren are educated we need to arm them a solid foundation in Scripture, in the truths of God’s Word, in the character and nature of God Himself.

There are ways of living without denying our God, our faith, our true allegiance. There are ways to maintain a dual identity or citizenship. We will see how wisely and well they did that next week.

What’s in a name? What’s up with the new names?

Let’s look at their names for a moment. To us they are just names, they had names that were no doubt common in Judah and were given names likely to have been common in Babylon. But there is a lot more going on here.

Each of the four Hebrew names contains a name of God. Daniel and Mishael both end in “el” which means God and is used in Elohim.

Daniel means God is my judge; or God’s judge.

Mishael means Who is like God?

The other two names, Hananiah and Azariah both contain a short form of Jehovah (iah).

Hananiah means Jehovah is gracious; or one who has obtained mercy from God.

Azariah means Jehovah is my helper; or one whom is helped by God.

So here are four men in Babylon whose very names are reminders of their faith and ties to Judah.

All four of the names they are given contain references to the false gods of Babylon, Marduk, Bel, and Nebo. This was a form of the indoctrination and brainwashing and propaganda.

Their names were changed to remove any remembrance of their homeland and faith, to have nothing in common with their own people. They belong now to the king.

As we will see next week, you can change the name but not the heart.

Is God Lord in Babylon too?

God's role in human history is an active role, not a passive role. God never leaves us or forsakes us. God didn't just create, He actively sustains, orders, maintains, provides, plans, purposes.

First, God's sovereignty is an *active sovereignty*. His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Why did the nation of Israel decline?
Why did Nebuchadnezzar attack?
Why was Jehoiakim delivered over to him?
Why were temple treasures stolen?

Was it because Babylon was a bully, because Babylon was bigger and stronger? Or because Judah got in the way of an expanding imperialist empire? No, not at all.

God gave. God handed Judah over to her enemies, to Babylon.

People don't talk that way today. People don't think that way today. People today are not theocentric, they are not God centered, they don't have a worldview that includes a God.

The only reason Nebuchadnezzar succeeded is because God wanted to humble His people.

Second, there is another side to God's sovereignty that we see here. His *sovereignty is faithful*, honest, just. God's sovereignty isn't always sweetness and light, His faithfulness includes judgment.

God did this because God said He would do this if certain things happened. Leviticus 26 is a long list of warnings and possible curses.

Leviticus 26:31-33 And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas. 32 And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. 33 And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.

Leviticus 26:37-39 And you shall have no power to stand 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, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.

Those warnings were in the time of Moses. There had been much more recent warnings.

II Kings 20:16-18 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord: 17 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. 18 And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

What God had said He would do, He is doing. Just as He said.

Third, God’s sovereignty is a *humble sovereignty*, He is willing to suffer shame. The taking of temple treasures was tantamount to saying your God is a loser and our god is a winner. Remember when the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant? That brought great shame on Israel. Yahweh was weak and Dagon was superior. Of course, it got a bit embarrassing when the statue of Dagon kept falling down in front of the ark. But the perception in those days was this taking of temple treasures said something about their god.

The temple was God’s chosen place to dwell. If ever there was an impenetrable place on earth the temple of the Holy God would be it. Just to touch the Ark of the Covenant was instant death. That it could be raided and robbed is unthinkable. Where was God? Why did He not defend His name and honor?

God is willing to suffer this shame for a greater purpose and end. Just as Jesus willing suffered the shame of becoming human and even dying on a cross for a greater good.

Not a hair falls from our head, not a sparrow falls to the ground, without God’s knowledge and permission. The most wicked acts of the most evil men are under the providential purposes of God. Everything that happens in a believer’s life is part of His sanctifying purposes.

Psalm 23 Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He is with us, His rod and staff, they comfort us.