

Week-4

The Prophecy of Daniel

“Believers Versus Babylonians”

Daniel is the fourth of the so-called “major prophets” and the third of the so-called captivity prophets. When we meet Daniel — as Jerusalem falls the first time — he is about fourteen years old. There was not a great deportation of people to Babylon at this time, but a few select people, including Daniel and three of his teenage friends, who were carried off together into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had apparently commanded, “I want the nobles and the princes and the really intelligent young men to be educated in my universities.” God was using the decree of a pagan world ruler to strategically place a ministry in Babylon for the good of His people, so that by the time most of the captives arrived, they would have some influence in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar.

Examples and Warnings

The twelve chapters of the Book of Daniel fall into two equal divisions. The first six chapters are an historical narrative. Chapters seven through twelve are prophetic revelations. The key verse to all the historical narrative of the Bible and that which is found in Daniel Chapters 1–6 is a New Testament verse, which says, “All these things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11)

In the Old Testament you see that the spiritual lives of most of God’s people had high points and low points. However, that is not true of Joseph and Daniel. They both lived their entire adult lives in the hostile culture of the political arenas of world empires. These men are two of the purest people you will meet in the Word of God. While Joseph lived at the right hand of an Egyptian Pharaoh, Daniel lived his entire adult life in the hostile culture of Babylonian and Persian politics.

He outlived Nebuchadnezzar and his son, Belshazzar. He lived to see the Babylonian Empire fall to the Persian Empire. He survived and functioned as a prophet through the entire seventy-year period of the Babylonian captivity. He was too old and feeble to return with the captives, but he did see their return from captivity.

It was Daniel’s role to show the people of Judah how to cope with captivity, an assignment that began when he was only fourteen years old. Daniel coped with captivity in a magnificent way, and thus was a superb example for the people of Judah — and for us today.

The Resolve of Daniel

The Apostle Paul wrote: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) This verse has been paraphrased: “Do not let the world squeeze you into its own mold but let God re-mould your mind from within.” This was an exhortation to believers in the New Testament, but the very same truth applied to Daniel when he arrived in Babylon.

It did not take Daniel long to realize that the pressure was on him to conform to the Babylonian culture. He was chosen and forced into the university in Babylon and trained by the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar to one day be a good Babylonian leader for them. The first issue to confront Daniel was the rich Babylonian food. That food probably included pork and all kinds of things that were unclean for a Jewish young man to eat. We read that, “Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.” (Daniel 1:8)

Daniel's name meant, "God is my judge." Daniel was walking before God, asking God to judge his every move. His three friends also had names with spiritually significant meanings. Mishael meant, "Who is like God?" Hananiah meant "Jehovah was favored," and Azariah meant "helped by Jehovah."

The first thing the Babylonians did was to change the names of these Hebrew teenagers. Daniel's name was changed to Belteshazzar, which meant "Bel protect his life." Bel was a Babylonian god. The Babylonians were trying to make Daniel believe that he would be under the protection of a pagan god. Mishael's name was changed to Meshach, which is Mardock in Babylonian. Mardock was also a Babylonian god. Hananiah's name was changed to Shadrach, which is the name of the moon god of Babylon. And Azariah's name was changed to Abednego, which meant "servant of the Babylonian god of wisdom." (Daniel 1:7)

Nebuchadnezzar was saying to these four young men, "We are going to make Babylonians out of you." But Daniel and these three teenagers stood up to Nebuchadnezzar and the whole Babylonian Empire when they said, in essence, "You are not going to make Babylonians out of us. We are going to make believers out of you!"

The fourth chapter of Daniel tells us that Nebuchadnezzar, the genius who put together the great Babylonian Empire, professed faith in God. This is one of the most magnificent chapters in the Bible. What brought Nebuchadnezzar to that profession of faith? It all started when Daniel refused to defile himself with the rich, but impure, unclean foods of Babylon.

Interpreting Dreams

Very early in the captivity, Daniel and his friends had another confrontation. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, and his dream greatly troubled him. He called in his wise men and said to them, "Tell me what I dreamed and then interpret my dream for me." As you might imagine, this was a tremendous problem for the wise men of Babylon. It is not really difficult to interpret dreams, but how does anyone know your interpretation is the right one? That is what Nebuchadnezzar was thinking. When Nebuchadnezzar put that challenge before his wise men, they were distraught and filled with panic. When a ruler like Nebuchadnezzar asked you to do something, you did what they asked or you were in big trouble. They said to the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! ... No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men." (Daniel 2:10, 11) This answer so infuriated Nebuchadnezzar that he ordered the execution of all the wise men. That included Daniel and his friends because they were students of those wise men.

When the executioner arrived to put them to death, Daniel spoke up with great wisdom and tact. He asked, "Why is the decree of the king so severe?" The executioner in effect replied, "The king and his wise men had a disagreement. The wise men said that the gods do not live in men, and therefore they cannot tell the king what he dreamed."

A paraphrase and summary of Daniel's response would be: "Ah, but that is where they are wrong, because God does live in men. Daniel went to see the king and asked the king to give him some time so that he might tell the king what he dreamed and the interpretation of his dream. Daniel then told his three friends what he had done and they began to pray. That night in a vision, God supernaturally revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream — and its interpretation — to Daniel.

Daniel had his audience with Nebuchadnezzar, and the essence of their conversation was: "Young man, I understand you can tell me what I dreamed and interpret my dream for me." Daniel replied, "Only God can do what you have asked your wise men to do, Oh king. Your wise men are wrong. God

does dwell with men and He has told me what you dreamed and the interpretation of your dream.” When Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar what he dreamed and interpreted the dream for him, the king fell on his face, and from that day forward he always referred to Daniel as “the man in whom the Spirit of God lives.” (Chapter 2)

Daniel’s interpretation of the king’s dream is only one of five miracles recorded in the Book of Daniel that demonstrate the fact that there is such a thing as the supernatural. The other four miracles are: the rescue of Daniel’s three friends from the fiery furnace (chapter three), Nebuchadnezzar’s profession of faith (chapter four), the handwriting on the wall (chapter five), and the rescue of Daniel from the lions in the lions’ den (chapter six).

Through these miracles, Daniel and his friends demonstrated the kind of faith that can cope with the worst of times. They had a faith that believed in the supernatural power of God, absolutely. They believed in the power of prayer, absolutely, and they believed absolutely in the providence of God that had placed them in Babylon.

Have you ever had crises in your life that were inescapable, unavoidable, intolerable, and confronted you with the impossible? The crises faced by Daniel and his friends in Babylon were inescapable, unavoidable, intolerable, and confronted them with the impossible. They showed us how to live with that kind of crisis, by the way, they lived through their own crises in Babylon.

As you think about these miracles in the Book of Daniel, ask yourself these questions: Do you believe in the supernatural power of God? Do you believe in the supernatural power of prayer? And do you believe in the providences and purposes of God for placing you where you are for the glory of God? Do you believe these things absolutely?