

Faithfulness in a Foreign Land

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[0 : 00] Open up your Bibles, Daniel chapter 1. I'm going to read the whole chapter. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

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.

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, youths without blemish of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning and competence to stand in the king's palace and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

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.

Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel, he called Belteshazzar.

[1 : 51] Hananiah, he called Shadrach. Mishael, he called Meshach. And Azariah, he called Abednego. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

Therefore, he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favour and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my lord, the king who had assigned your food and your drink, for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the ewes who are of your own age?

So you would endanger my head with the king. Then Daniel said to the steward, whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Test your servants for ten days.

Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the ewes who eat the king's food be observed by you and deal with your servants according to what you see.

[3 : 03] So he listened to them in this manner and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the ewes who ate the king's food.

So the steward took away their food and the wine they would drink and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

At the end of the time when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar and the king spoke with them and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Therefore they stood before the king and in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were all his kingdom.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Okay, over to you.

[4 : 25] What were you doing when you were somewhere around 15 years old? Have a yard of the person next to you. What were you doing? You might not be 15, that's okay.

What would you like to be doing when you're 15? What were you doing when you were about 15 years old? What were you up to? What were you doing when you were 15 years old?

I'm sure. I was in junior high school, living at home, went to church for my family and my life was settled.

It was good. I felt secure, I felt safe. I didn't have a care in the world. It was lovely. Life was good. I could ride my push bike around. I could have fun with my mates, went camping with my family in the youth group, spent time on the uncle's farm, doing all kinds of things that blokes enjoy doing on uncle's farms.

For others, life around 10 to 12 has been much harder. Parents have been splitting up. Bad things have been happening to them.

[5 : 57] World's at war right now for a lot of people, 12 to 15 years old. Parents have died. For others have left and gone to boarding school.

Life changes quickly. We knew our name. We know our name. We know our family. We know where we belong. But when Daniel was about 15 years old, somewhere around that age, his life changed radically.

He was forcibly taken 1,000 kilometers away from the security of his family in Jerusalem and taken to the land of Babylon. And there his life changed radically.

In Daniel, we see the sovereign hand of God at work. The Chaldean kingdoms of the Babylonians and the Persians are pitted against the kingdom of God.

And we see that the kingdom of God is ultimately the victor. And the big point of the book of Daniel is that the creator God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the king of kings and lord of lords.

[7 : 10] He's the boss. He's the one to serve. And God's people are to remember that and they are to serve him. No matter where they are in the world, no matter what's happening to them in the world, God's people are to remember who they are and who they belong to, no matter what the circumstances.

So to get a handle on Daniel, let's have a look at a bit of an idea of what Daniel, before Daniel turns up. Let's get a bit of a feel for the book of Daniel, what happens before, right? Let's go back to about 1000 BC, right?

About 1000 BC. There's a bit of a map hopefully up here. There you go. So 1000 BC, David was the king of Israel. That's what happens. He becomes the king. And there's a few markers to be aware of there, right?

And then his son, David's son, Solomon, follows him as king. And after Solomon, there's 12 tribes of Israel. There's 12 tribes. There's 10 northern tribes that become under Jeroboam and they become the nation known as Israel.

And then there's the southern two tribes under the king Rehoboam become Judah, right? There's two major groups of the Jews, right?

[8 : 24] None of those two kings followed God particularly well. Instead, they lead them to worship idols, the very thing they weren't supposed to do. And 722 BC, the Assyrians invade the northern 10 tribes of Israel and we never hear them again.

They're carried off over into exile in Assyria. Don't hear much about them at all, really, after that.

The southern two tribes, right, of Judah and Benjamin stagger from one king to the next, good and bad, good and bad.

Generally go from bad to worse. And the southern two tribes, just if you can hold me, the southern two tribes then became known as Israel. With me so far?

Not in heads? They're Israel, right? They become Israel. Well, they're Judah but they're known as Israel. Anyway, so that is the Israelite nation but they're the tribes of Judah.

Alright. And then God brings upon them the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar and so begins the Babylonian exile of the Jews. And in this world we have Daniel.

[9 : 39] Now, during the book of Daniel, we have, in verse 1, we got here, in the third year, the king of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

So, that happened in about 605 BC. That's when that happens. And in that year he besieged Jerusalem for the first time and it may be that he attacked the neighbouring towns just north around there and became a major threat to Jerusalem.

There's a bit of a picture here, you can see where the Babylonian region was, maybe, I don't know. Yep, there's the Babylonian Empire there, coming into power. During the first attack in Jerusalem,

in verse 2, notice that the Lord Yahweh is the one who delivers the people into Nebuchadnezzar's hand and along with some of the vessels of the house of God.

Nebuchadnezzar might think that he defeated Jerusalem, but in fact, the Lord God is the one who allows Nebuchadnezzar to win. Rehoboam the king, articles of the temple of Jerusalem are carried out to Jerusalem and placed in the temple of his God.

The stage is set, the stage is set by placing the vessels of Israel's God into the house of Nebuchadnezzar's God.

[11:03] Right? Nebuchadnezzar is demonstrating by his actions that he believes that his God has given him victory over Israel's God, Judah's God.

And notice also that they're in the land of Shinar. Right? Now, you should remember that Shinar comes up in Genesis chapter 11, the Tower of Babel, that people try to make a name for themselves and they got together and tried to storm heaven.

Do away with God. But the Lord God scattered them to the nations. And yet, the worst is yet to come upon Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah said what will happen and does.

There's another deportation in 597 BC and then a major catastrophe in 587 BC after the Babylonians besieged the place for two years and had decimated the population.

Nebuchadnezzar had the temple and the king's palace burnt to the ground. And you can read about it in 2 Kings 25 and in Jeremiah 39 and Jeremiah 52.

[12:15] But come back to Jeremiah chapter 52 and just read a little bit of the account. Jeremiah chapter 52. So it's Isaiah, Jeremiah, gets to Ezekiel, then Daniel. So come to Jeremiah.

Just a couple of books back. Jeremiah 52 and pick it up at verse 12. verse 12. We'll just read down to verse 16.

Jeremiah 52 verse 12. In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the bodyguard, who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem and he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem.

Every great house he burned down and all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. And Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, carried away captives, some of the poorest of the people and the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters, who had deserted the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the artisans.

But Nebuchadnezzar, the captain of the guard, left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and ploughmen. So Daniel would have heard about that news while he's in Babylon.

[13:42] Come to the end of chapter 1 and you see there verse 21. 539, Cyrus the Persian. As he goes through this time in Babylon, it's going to be very easy to doubt that God exists.

It would be very easy to give up on God. It would be very easy to forget who you are and who you belong to. But the kingdom of Babylon is not going to last because Cyrus the Persian will come and defeat it.

And you see here, Daniel's there, verse 31, Daniel was there in Babylon until the first year of Cyrus, King Cyrus. Cyrus, a bit of a map here, hopefully we'll see.

Cyrus captured the land, yeah, massive kingdom, massive kingdom, the Persian Empire. carried land from way over, he diverted, well, he diverted the Uthrates River so he could get in, he was a very clever king in his battle.

He didn't destroy Babylon completely, instead he won over the hearts of the Babylonians, saying that Marduk, their god, had given him the victory because Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, hadn't been served.

[15:03] Under Cyrus, the captives of Babylon are allowed to go home to their lands, to Jerusalem, and yet it was God who worked through Cyrus to do his saving work. The gods of Babylon cannot stand up to the God of Israel.

And notice that Daniel's in Babylon all this time, around 70 years, he's in Babylon. So if he was 15 when he went to Babylon, he's going to be something like 85 now.

Right? Which would have been extremely old in those days, when people, you know, average lifespan is 40 to 50. So here's another slide here, hopefully you can see.

There we go. So he's in that time, that's when Daniel is in exile there for 70 years, until Cyrus the Persian comes, and Cyrus gives an edict to go back to the land, or the captives to go back. And then the times after, well what happens afterwards, after the book of Daniel? Israel returns to the land, but it's never as good as it was before.

[16:18] They never have peace in their land, and the foreign powers continue to trample through them. Alexander the Great comes and conquers the world, including Babylon. And after Alexander the Great come the Romans, and world power is established by them, and then we're at the time of Jesus.

So, during the time of Daniel, there are great realignments in world powers, but behind it all, the Lord God is sovereign in bringing about his plans and purposes.

Who's going to be ruling, and what's happening in the land? So, it's a good spot now to sort of just step back and get a feel for the whole book of Daniel, right? Here's a bit of a sketch, right, of the whole book of Daniel.

So, Daniel can be broken up into roughly two halves, two halves of Daniel. The first half are stories about the destinies of the nations, and the second half are stories about the nation of Israel.

Israel, and interesting, the second half of the visions are in the common language of the Jews, Hebrew, and the first half, or most of the first half, is in the common language of the nations, Aramaic.

[17:40] So, they can understand it clearly. Well, Daniel's in exile, to sum it all up, in the days of Daniel, he and the majority of the surviving Israelites, surviving people, the southern two tribes, are in Babylon, in exile.

And, having looked at the beginning and the end of the chapter, let's look at the content, then, of chapter one. Nebuchadnezzar is a very clever king, he wanted to raise up leaders for his kingdom, and his plan was, he had his own MTS strategy.

There you go, that's what he had. Slightly different to ours, different goals, different method, but a strategy, nonetheless. Daniel, his friends, would be on this training strategy for three years, not two years, right?

He chose them, he changed them, and he conditioned them. He wanted to create political ministers, artisans, in the court. And he chose the cream of the crop.

You see there, in verses three to seven, he chose the cream of the crop. Perfect, physical, handsome, smart, well-informed, sharp as tax, intellectually, the best of the best.

[18:57] Just like, Johnno, and Lockie. We give them two years, Nebuchadnezzar gave them three, ours are smarter.

And not only were they chosen, but they were changed. They were renamed, you see there, in verses six to seven, not just any old name, but names of the gods of Babylon, right?

So Daniel's called Belshazzar, after the name of Nebuchadnezzar's god. Instead of being addressed as Daniel, God is my judge, he's constantly addressed as Belshazzar, after the god of Babylon, Bel.

Nebuchadnezzar would call him Belshazzar. His teacher would call him Belshazzar. Belshazzar, pay attention now. Belshazzar, would you like some lunch?

Belshazzar, would you like something? Belshazzar, Belshazzar, I'm trying to teach my dog its name, its name is Benji. He's a slow learner. Anyway, Daniel's been addressed as Belshazzar.

[20:10] Kind of like giving UQ college students their college name, right? Lose your identity, get a new name. It would be the same for these three men who have been chosen.

And they're conditioned. Not only are they chosen and their names change, but they are also being conditioned to the ways of Babylon. Taught the language, taught the literature, and the culture, therefore, of the Babylonians, verse 4.

And remember, hang on a second, he's only a young man, only a young bloke. Nebuchadnezzar's trying to reprogram them.

They've been reprogrammed to be Babylonians and enter the service of a Babylonian king and Babylonian gods. What will happen to Daniel?

I mean, what would happen to you? Who will Daniel serve? Will he continue to serve the true and living God?

[21:23] Or will he serve the gods of Babylon and be swallowed up by the culture of the day? It's a big call for a young man. It's a big call for anyone, really.

And so Daniel draws the line here in verses 8 to 16. He's going to remain faithful to God while he lives so far away from home. He will remain faithful to God after he's seen Nebuchadnezzar or heard of Nebuchadnezzar plunder the temple.

But will he remember who he serves, which God he serves in the midst of all this? And if you're going to remain faithful, where will you draw the line?

Daniel draws the line in the first chapter when it comes to food. He won't eat the king's food. The finest food in the land, the best land, best food that's available at the time.

Doesn't deal with the prison guard. The prison guard can have the choice food, but Daniel just wants vegetables and water. Verses 8 to 16, you see it there.

[22 : 40] Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank. Therefore, he asked the chief of the official eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favour and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

To eat someone's food is to accept their hospitality, their fellowship. It's to be dependent upon them, have a relationship with someone.

To eat food from the king's table is to have fellowship with the king. And what you do when you're in fellowship with someone is that you eat with them.

Now, not only will there be unclean food there, but he'll be defiling his conscience by obligating himself to Nebuchadnezzar and his ways.

I mean, you know, there's no such thing as a free lunch. There's always obligations, there's always hidden costs, always other agendas. But God honours his friends for their stand and they far exceed the others who are in training.

[23 : 54] They look better, they look smarter, they're more gifted, they're ten times better. And notice verse 17. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in all the visions and dreams.

God had made them and made them excel. God granted them skills in all the literature and wisdom and even granted him understanding of visions and dreams.

Something that the Babylonian magicians were thought to have. They were conditioned but in the end, Nebuchadnezzar wasn't able to turn them to his ways.

They remember who they are, who they serve and who they belong to. They reign faithful to God, the true and living God. Pretty amazing, I think, when you consider how old these guys would have been.

I wonder if we would have been able to make a stand like that. I wonder if we would be able to maintain our identity in a situation carted away.

[25 : 10] Friends, in many ways we're in a similar situation to Daniel. Those of us who are God's people, we're living, we're not in our homeland, we're living in exile, not because of a particular sin, we're just not living in our homeland yet.

See, we are God's people who have been chosen. We read about it in Ephesians chapter 1. We've been chosen not by Nebuchadnezzar, but we've been chosen by the true and living God.

We've been chosen to be his people, to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Saviour. And the big difference is, not many of us are of noble birth.

Not many of us are artisans. I speak for myself. We're not really necessarily perfect physical examples.

We're not particularly necessarily clever, sharp, or intellectually quick to understand things, although some of us are. Nonetheless, God has chosen us to be his people through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 28] And as we read in 1 Peter, we are now in exile. We're not living in our true home. Our home's not Israel. Our home is in the real presence of God in heaven and the new heavens and the new earth.

That's going to be our home. The place where there's no suffering, no sicknesses, no bad stuff, no cancer, no sin. And one day, God's faithful people will all be taken there.

And one day, God will call us home from our exile. It might be after we die or it might be during our lifetime.

But he will call us home. And as God's chosen people live in exile, most of us are in a far, far better state than Daniel was. We have more history than he had.

We can look back to the Lord Jesus Christ who has come in fulfilment of God's plans and purposes. We are generally, well not this morning necessarily, but we're generally a little bit older than 15. [27 : 38] But we're still called to stay faithful to God no matter what. So, will we be faithful to God who we serve? Or will we fear man and serve man?

The pressure's always on to forget who we are, to be conditioned by the pressures of the culture that we live in and to forget the God that we serve. And we've been changed, not only chosen but we've been changed.

We are to live as God would have us live now. Our identity is not the identity of this world. It's not to be that of our environment. Our identity is to be one that makes the boss of us look good.

Our identity will be what God has made us to be. God called us to be like our saviour. So, we'll be humble, we'll be gentle, we'll be meek, we'll be submissive, we'll be loving, we'll be kind, we'll be faithful, we'll be peaceable, we'll be good.

We are God's people because he's called us and saved us and changed us. We're to serve the true and living God. We've been given a new name, Christian.

[29 : 04] And we're to be conditioned, transformed, day by day growing our understanding of God's ways. in the ways of God's kingdom. So, we enter his service. God's people, we're eating at his table, feeding on his word.

As we store it up in our lives and meditate on our hearts and we grow in maturity in Christlikeness, growing to mean the knowledge and the understanding of the God who made us and made this world, growing our muscles of faith and so we can stand the time of testing and receive well done, good and faithful servant on that last day.

Our universities are selecting people for their courses. Our society is always continually conditioning our minds, bombarding us with the culture that's foreign to those who belong to King Jesus.

The companies on the campus will be on campus again and again choosing the cream of the crop if they can, looking for people to run their businesses, to be their CEOs one day, looking up for leaders to step up to positions to grow their organisations and their kingdoms.

But we're different. We are on about growing, raising up, maturing, leaders for God's kingdom.

[30 : 37] So, what's God's word for us as we live in exile away from our homeland? We're to live in the world but not of the world.

We're to live peaceful and quiet lives as we look forward to the coming of Jesus. We're to be salt and light in our communities that we live in. It's okay to live in the world, you know, you can't not live in the world and to work for the companies and work for the businesses but it's critical we remember who we belong to and it's critical to remember who we serve and critical to know where we draw the line.

There'll be times where we have to draw the line and say no, else we'll be compromising our Christian convictions and our Christian character. It's going to be hard and it is hard for the Christian doctors.

It's going to be hard and it will be hard for the business people. We may be put in situations that would defile our Christian conscience and our Christian moral consciences.

For Daniel it was eating at the king's table, the king's food, being obligated to the king. He wouldn't defile himself in that way. But it won't be easy to live drawing the line in this culture.

[31 : 56] 1 Peter promises us that but it's the way for God's people to live in this world before we're taken home. The kingdom of God and this world are in conflict and while we live this side of the kingdom of heaven we need to remember who we are and remember who we serve.

And you know what brothers and sisters, the good thing is we're not called to do it alone. Daniel had his faithful companions around about him, encouraging him to keep pressing on.

We do too, that's what the church is all about and yet we're in a far far better position than Daniel because we have God's Holy Spirit who has come and he helps us as well.

Well that's Daniel 1, let's press into Daniel 2 next week, let's pray. Our Father in heaven we thank you that you brought us into your family, into your kingdom.

Please help us to live faithfully as your men and women as we long for the turn of our Lord Jesus Christ and the end of our exile and bring us home to your homeland.

[33 : 14] For we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.