

Daniel: Living in a Hostile World

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[0 : 00] We're reading from chapter 1, it's on page 883. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiachim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

And the Lord delivered Jehoiachim, 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.

Then the king ordered Ashpinaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility. 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. 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.

Among these were some from Judah. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names. To Daniel, the name Belteshazzar.

[1 : 18] To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael, Meshach. And to Azariah, Abednego. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way.

Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel but the official told Daniel, I am afraid of my lord the king who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men of your age?

The king would then have my head because of you. Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Please test your servants for ten days.

Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance to what you see.

So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

[2 : 30] To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.

The king talked with them and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom and Daniel remained there until the first year of king Cyrus.

There's a little sheet there to hand out.

If maybe somebody could get the box of pens as well and pass them around if anybody would like a pen please put your hand up and a pen can be brought to you. Thanks Connor for reading that.

We're going to be looking at Daniel over the next number of weeks. You can follow the headings which will give you an indication of perhaps what it's about each chapter in the term programme and we will also be following it up on our Wednesday evening studies as well.

[4 : 09] So as we start into Daniel let's pray and ask for God's help.

Our Father God we are amazed that a book, a story written hundreds of years ago is now preserved for us, before us in a language that we can understand.

But we come to this story recognising that it is not just any story but it is God's word to us.

God speaking his truth to us about himself, ourselves and the world in which we live. God's word to us about himself.

God's word to us about himself. So Father please would you teach us, instruct us, command us, train us in the ways that we should go.

[6 : 13] Speak to us now, through your holy word we pray. Amen. The world that we live in is hostile and dangerous.

With conflicts raging between Russia and Ukraine, the spread of ISIS across Syria and Iraq, the innocent slaughter of whole villages by Boko Haram, the continual news of murder and rape and violent assault on our own streets, the world we live in is not a safe place to live, especially if you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

Listen to the news headings from around the world this past month. In Afghanistan, a Christian minister is kidnapped.

In Cameroon, church buildings were burnt down and their houses looted. In China, a pastor sentenced to 12 years in prison.

In Egypt, a few Christians sentenced to five years in prison. In India, a group of 100 Christians attacked by a mob.

[7 : 48] In Nigeria, gunmen opened fire on worshippers, killing some in four churches. In North Korea, tourists arrested and charged.

In Pakistan, a Christian teenager raped and killed. In Syria, homes belonging to Christians confiscated.

In Tanzania, a church building torched. In Vietnam, Bible school students taken away for interrogation.

And let's not forget our friends who have been imprisoned on the border. Now we mightn't face the same pressures that we have just read.

But I think we all feel the reality that our Christian views are no longer tolerated or accepted. We feel the squeeze of being rejected perhaps by family, maybe isolated by friends.

[8 : 55] The world that we live in as Christians is hostile and dangerous. And this is the kind of world that Daniel lived in.

Having experienced the brutal onslaught of the Babylonian military forces, Daniel now finds himself somewhat of a slave in a foreign land, under the rule of an unfaithful king who stood opposed to Daniel's God.

So the big question we want to start with at the very beginning is this. How do we, as God's people, live in a hostile world?

How do we live in a hostile world? Well there are three things that we need to know. The first thing that we need to know is the way in which God rules the world.

The way in which God rules the world. Look at verse 1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

[10 : 12] Now when we read about these two kings, this isn't just two kings at war. This is the world at war with God. You see, each nation, and it was well known at the time, that each nation had their own God, which each nation represented.

Nations and gods were inseparable. So if you attacked another nation, in effect you were attacking their God. And the king who won that battle, therefore had the more powerful God behind them.

Judah knew this. Babylon knew this. And more importantly, God knew this. Because God had chosen the people of Judah to be his special people.

He had rescued them from Egypt. He had entered into a special relationship with them. And now they were to represent him in the world as his people.

To live for him. So if Judah gets defeated, then God gets defeated. If Judah loses this battle with Babylon, then it's going to be reported all around the kingdom that God has lost the battle.

[11 : 34] So our expectation is, isn't it, that God is going to fight the Babylonians, and going to send them home battered and bruised.

But look what happens in verse 2. 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. You see, not only is the king defeated, but the temple, which was the very symbol of God's presence and power, has been pilfered.

The physical objects or the articles from the temple that represented Judah's God, have now all been taken away, and now they're sitting as trophies in the treasure house of Babylon's God. God has lost the battle. God is no longer in control. All of this talk about God being the creator, the sustainer of the universe, the supreme authority, the one with absolute power, that's all just hot air. [12:53] Now as we look out on the world today, isn't that our same conclusion? God powerful?

Don't be so stupid. Look at all the wars out there. Look at all the violence that's going on. God in charge? Don't be so silly.

Look at how his people are being persecuted and oppressed in every nation. And so we look and we watch, and we think God is a loser, and people think he's pathetic, he's weak, and he's a failure. But let's not rush to conclusions, and let's not read this introduction too quickly. Look at verse 2 again very carefully. Look what it says.

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hands. You see, the king of Babylon may have come with his military might, but it was the Lord who delivered them into his hands.

[14:12] And the chat about town may have been that Nebuchadnezzar rules, but history records for us that it is God who rules.

You see, what seems like the death and the defeat of God is in reality the power and authority of God.

The nation of Judah might feel that God has abandoned them, that he's left them, that he's weak, and he's lost control, and he's no good. And as we live in this world with all its hostility, we might think that God is lost, and that he's weak, and he's powerless, and somehow we're left on our own to try and cope.

But don't forget the assurance of verse 2. The Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

God is in charge. And at the very outset of the book, we are to get this message drummed into us, that here is a God who rules over the kings and the kingdoms of this world.

[15:27] He orders events as he wills. He does what he pleases to accomplish his plan and his purpose.

This is the way in which God rules. So the first thing we need to know as we live in the hostile world is to know the way in which God rules.

He is in charge. The second thing we need to know is the way we should live. Look at verse 3.

After the siege, which was horrific, and the people were taken into slavery, we read in verse 3 that the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of the court officials, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and nobility, 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.

And among those, look at verse 6, were some who were from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all taken.

[16:58] Now these lads were the pick of the crop, weren't they? They had the looks, they had the brains, and they had the body. But here we find them, not with any special treatment, but here they are under the oppressive rule of a king, who opposed their god, and forces them into a program or a regime of assimilation.

He wants to turn these young men into Babylonians. And they had a very clever way to do it. They had to, first of all, learn a new culture.

So look at the rest of verse 4. He was to teach them, these young men, the language and the literature of the Babylonians. They would have to learn history from their perspective.

They would have to learn all about their culture and the way that they do things. And, they had to adopt to new customs. Verse 5.

They had to eat what the king wanted them to eat. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. And they were to be trained for three years.

[18:11] And after that, they would enter the king's service. And in case they ever got any illusions as to thinking of going back, they were given a complete new identity.

Verse 7. The chief official gave them new names. And all their new names were named after Babylonian gods.

So to Daniel, he would be called Belshazzar, to Hananiah, Shadrach, to Mishael, Meshach, and to Azariah, Abednego. The message was plain and simple.

You are no longer God's people. You are now Babylonian people. At every point of their life, they were to conform to this new way of living.

They were to be like the people around them and they were to live like the people around them. And isn't that the pressure that God's people face every single day?

[19 : 13] to be like those around us, to become like the world, to think like the world, to behave like the world, to live like the world.

We've got to change our views on marriage and become politically correct. We mustn't be so narrow-minded on abortion we must adapt to the culture.

we must accept that there isn't just one truth but whatever you determine is true. We've got to learn to conform.

We've got to fit in to everybody else and that's the pressure we all face every single day as we go to school or college or go to work or wherever we are.

So how are we to live in this hostile environment? well, God calls us to remain loyal to him, to make deliberate choices to be loyal to him.

[20 : 22] Look at verse 8. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way.

Now that seems quite strange. Daniel was willing to live in a new culture. He didn't fight that. He was willing to accept a new name and accept that, well, I'll be called Belshazzar.

I'll put up with that. But I'm not going to eat the food. Instead, he tells us in verse 12, he says to one of the officials, please test your servants for ten days.

Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Why was he so against eating the king's food? Well, this is not a campaign for more vegetarians or to save the furry animals.

This is all about loyalty to God. You see, the custom of accepting food from the king was to show loyalty to the king.

[21 : 34] If you had steak with the king, you are entering into a covenant with the king. So to eat the king's food was to turn your back on God.

It was to break loyalty with God and to align yourself to say, here's my new king, my new lord, my new master. And Daniel wouldn't do that.

God will be and we too have to make our stand in this hostile world to hold to the fact that scripture is the supreme authority, that Jesus Christ is the absolute truth.

It might seem so small and insignificant, but it's by those little choices of obeying scripture and trusting Christ with our lives that we show to a watching world where our loyalty lies, that my devotion and my loyalty is to God and his word and to his son the Lord Jesus Christ.

But let's remember, we don't do this alone. Look very carefully here at what's going on. The God who rules over this world is present with us in the world to help us as we face the hostilities and the pressures all around us.

[23 : 14] So look at verse 9. Now God had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to Daniel.

It's a little bit like verse 2. The Lord delivered. Now it's saying God caused the official to show favour to Daniel. We're not sure how the official managed to allow Daniel his vegetables and his water without the king finding out.

We don't know if he bribed the chef for what he did. But we do know that God caused the official to be favourable to Daniel.

God had not abandoned Daniel. Yes they were in a foreign land. Yes they were in a different place. But God hadn't left them. God was present in the pressure and he turned the heart of his enemy to be sympathetic towards Daniel.

So verse 16 the guard took away their choice food and the wine that they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

[24 : 25] Amazing. God turning somebody to work for the good of his people. You see when we face the pressures of this hostile world when we are being pushed and squeezed to conform and fit in our response is to remain loyal and obedient to God to trust that God is always ruling over our lives and the lives of everybody else around about us and we mightn't even see it we mightn't even feel it but God is present with us when we go to work when we go to college he is with us in the pressures of the world ruling over all things to work to the good for his people so we need to know how God rules we need to know how we are to live and third we need to know the way in which

God works the way in which God works as he rules this world and as we live loyal to him you see our hope I think is this and we probably prayed it I've prayed it that God would somehow ease the pressure could you just make things a little bit easier for me maybe we've even asked God to take us out of the hostility or out of the pressure that we find ourselves in remove it from us take me out of the situation but rather than take us out God keeps us in and works through us in the hostility we see this in three ways first look at how God works through Daniel look at verse 17 to these four young men

God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning you see rather than take them out of their situation he gives them what they need in the situation he provides them with learning and understanding so that they can be in the situation verse 18 so at the end of time set by the king to bring them in the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar and the king talked with them and he found none equal to Daniel Hananiah Mishael and Azariah so they entered the king's service at the beginning of chapter one God looks like he's dead buried and defeated by the end of chapter one God is ruling with all power and all authority God has preserved his people he has placed them in his place right at the very heart of the kingdom of

Babylon right with an access to the king who is on the throne who thought he had buried Judah's gods isn't that incredible in fact look at verse 20 in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in the whole of his kingdom and what we'll discover as we read through Daniel in the unfolding chapters is that Daniel is the one who comes to the aid of the king time and time again he's the one who can interpret the dreams he's the one who speaks God's truth he's the one who witnesses to the king and God will use Daniel to turn king Nebuchadnezzar's heart towards God God may appear to the watching world that he is weak and powerless and useless dead and buried but he is alive and well and he is at work through his people in the pressure and in the hostility and if we're in any doubt look at verse 21 look at this little statement at the very end and

Daniel remained there until the first year of king Cyrus well who's king Cyrus where did he come from well we'll find out about him later on in chapters 10 I think it is he was the king of the Persian empire they were the ones that came in and defeated the Babylonian empire Nebuchadnezzar will go the Babylonian empire will go kings will go kingdoms will go but God's man Daniel is still there he preserves his people in his place and rather than take us out of the hostility rather than ease the pressure that we're in he works with us and through us in the hostility so God works through Daniel but isn't this how God ultimately works all of the time he works through his son the

[30 : 12] Lord Jesus in the same way look at Philippians with me go to Philippians I haven't got a page number so if somebody has got it there they can call it out Philippians chapter 2 1179

Philippians chapter 2 look at the way in God works through his people especially through his son you see God is not immune from the suffering and the hostility of this world he doesn't stand back and say I'm not going to be a part of it what does he do God sends his son the Lord Jesus Christ into the hostility of this world look at chapter 2 verse 6 who speaking of

Jesus being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but he made himself nothing and took on the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness and found in appearance as a man he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross he invaded our world he moved into our world he didn't escape the hostility he came into the hostility he came to enemies like you and me to be among us to identify with us to serve us to die for us and when the pressure came on and it's most intense when the hostility was most of its worst Jesus didn't opt out he remained loyal and faithful and obedient to his father and he went to the cross for you and for me and while the watching world believes that

Jesus was dead and defeated as he hung on the cross look at verse 9 therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave Jesus the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the father you see God didn't remove himself from the world he came into the world and he worked through his son Jesus to bring salvation to the world and now he reigns as the risen Lord victorious over everyone and everything and he continues to do his work through those who love and trust his people and God continues to work through us you see Jesus didn't just save us to take us out of the world he saved us to send us back into the world he rescued us he entered into a relationship with us so that we as people might represent him in the world in which we live he calls us to be like a

Daniel live in the hostility of the world live in the pressure serve those who are around you and I know it's not easy and I know that it's tough and you maybe are frightened at the very prospect of going back to college or back to school maybe you're the only Christian in your classroom maybe you're the only Christian in your peer group and you're wondering how you're going to stand up maybe you're the only witness the Christian witness in your workplace and the pressure will be on and the hostility will be there but God has rescued you and he calls you to be his representative and he gives us something much greater than just knowledge and understanding he gives us the power of his Holy Spirit and rather than take you out of the situation rather than remove the pressure from you he works through you where you are we mightn't get to serve in the palace of a king like Daniel but guess what we are serving the king of kings the risen lord Jesus the one who rules over the kingdoms the one who has authority and power over all things and all people working that power in you and through you to accomplish his plan and his purpose and as we go through we'll see how God used Daniel in the hostile world to bring kings to faith in Christ to reveal God's plan for the world and God does that through you to be his witness where you are and he will preserve you and he will keep you and he will enable you to live for him let's pray together father our mind boggles at the very thought of all that is going on in the world right now and all that has gone on in the past and all that will go on in the future but to know that God is ruling from all time from all eternity that he is in charge ruling the kings and kingdoms of this world ruling the events and circumstances and ruling over his people thank you for the assurance it brings us that we are not alone in this world but that you are with us and we ask that you would strengthen us equip us that we may be loyal followers of you tomorrow tomorrow morning tomorrow morning when we face the pressure when we are facing being squeezed to fit in that we will stand strong for you in the knowledge that you have called us to be your people in the world thank you that you have given us the power of your Holy Spirit to live well for you help us to do that trusting that you are always working your purposes out we praise you for the great God that you are
[37 : 58] Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen