

Daniel 1

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[0 : 0 0] 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 nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and the 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, Mishaël, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names. Daniel he called Belteshazzar. Hananiah he called Shadrach.

Mishaël 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.

[1 : 0 9] Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear the Lord my king who assigned you food and your drink.

For why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths 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 has assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah.

Test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables and eat and water to drink.

Then let our appearance and the appearances of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you. And deal with your servants according to what you see. So he listened to them in this matter 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 youths who ate the king's food. So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

[2 : 1 7] 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, Mishaël, 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 in all his kingdom.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Sirius. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, the newspapers have made me aware that today marks the beginning of the National Football League regular season year 2013-2014.

I don't really pay that much attention to football. I know others of you do. It might be a relief to some of you that I don't follow it religiously.

For others, you might think, well, that's the straw that broke the camel's back. I'm out of here and not coming back. Not only is our pastor not indigenously urban, we now question whether he's even an American.

[3 : 56] That said, as I was trying to get into the mind of Daniel, the wayfaring stranger on the road to Babylon, a football illustration came to mind.

Late 1950s, Vince Lombardi leaves the New York Jets as an assistant to become the head coach of the Green Bay Packers who hailed from Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The Lombardi family drove to Green Bay as a family. His biography reports the family's feelings along the way having been uprooted.

Marie, his wife, could not suppress the tears when her husband steered their two-toned Chevy toward the turnpike to begin their long trek to Wisconsin. Was this the beginning or the end?

Her 12-year-old daughter sobbed behind her. Green Bay was beyond Susan's wildest imaginations of the world.

[5 : 04] On the morning of their third day on the road, the Lombardis rounded Chicago and crossed Wisconsin's southern border. As they approached Milwaukee, the scenery changed dramatically to white on white.

And young Vincent and Susan looked out in disbelief and despair. Young Vincent later remembered, quote, When we drove around Chicago, everything was fine.

And we were up and talking. And then it got real silent in the car. When we saw this snow. We were going into a depression here.

I'm thinking, Where is he taking me? I don't think I want to do this. And how wrong they were. Lombardi voted the greatest coach of all time.

And all the championships in Green Bay begin under his reign. Looking back at Daniel, walking toward Babylon, or even those early post-exilic communities trying to find their way.

[6 : 24] They were in need of comfort. And understanding that God was underneath the events of the world. They were in need of strength to fulfill their commitments made to him in a strange place.

And they were in need of confidence that God would bless them as they went on their way. The book of Daniel, in final form, would have emerged first in post-exilic Jewish congregations trying to make their way in the world.

And it was a world altered from the idealized reign of David and his ancient kingdom. The world that these readers lived in was not very much to their own liking.

In fact, the book's earliest possible readers would have been Israelites living sometime between 525 or 170 BCE, depending upon how you view things.

One constant would have held for that time period. Israel was without a king, at least of any consequence.

[7 : 53] And they were without a kingdom that could rightly be called their own. The first ones who read the words that we heard read this morning had a loss of political autonomy.

They were subject to a life of subservience under other geopolitical authorities. They were familiar with suffering, even perhaps the destruction of everything religiously that they had known and held dear.

They were displaced. They were religious still. But their mode of worship is now increasingly being regulated by negotiated freedoms won from those in power.

And for them, Daniel was a salve. It was an ointment on an open wound.

It was the best bedtime reading available on the market. I guess the Big Picture Story Bible hadn't come out then. There's nothing like a good old-fashioned retelling of events that happened to the boys in Babylon that would have put steel in the backbone of those readers and reconciled themselves to being at home even under occupied rule.

[9 : 28] In reading and rereading Daniel, these families, and I'm imagining the children most among them would learn to call any place home.

They would gain confidence and the commitments that were desperately needed if they were to remain faithful in the new setting and useful to Yahweh and even to those in the world.

This is a book that invited them and now it invites us this fall. We look back on the fidelity and wisdom of Daniel for the purpose of gaining strength for today.

A word about today. Our connection to those early readers. Christians all over the world, increasingly even in the West, share the early readers' lot in life.

Our King and His kingdom feel so far away. Jesus, His reign is relegated to something of the ancient past or something yet to be, but not so much like something here with you or with me.

[11 : 10] Our rulers like theirs possess all the malleable traits of soaking wood.

Increasingly bent more and more on dictating the terms of worship and perhaps many even fear them hammering down limits on Christian ways.

What Daniel offered the early readers is what Daniel offers us. A heart knowledge that God is at work and a heart confidence that like those who came before you, it is possible for you to remain faithful to Christ and fruitful in this world.

the opening chapter kind of blossoms in a three-fold way. One to seven, kings, kingdoms, and the leading characters.

Take a look. The circumstances that stand behind the entire narrative are right there in verses one and two. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

[12 : 36] 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.

The book opens with this act of catastrophe. I hope you can actually feel the weight of it. Two things stand out.

Israel's king has been defeated and the vessels used in Israel's worship have been displaced. And if you were to read a bit further on, you learn that the severity of displacement extends not only to the vessels for worship, but actually to Israel's best and brightest young men.

Simply put, Daniel opens in a terrible way. Israel's king and kingdom are conquered, which means that the end of Jerusalem as a functioning center for their geopolitical life in the world has ended.

the ablest vessels for her worship and her work have been hauled off to exile and with them all the covenantal promises of God are evaporating into air.

[14 : 00] And truth be told, Israel's long, slow march toward this demise as a factor on the world stage was a long time in coming. We're told now that Daniel and his friends were taken, there it is, verse 1, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah.

The date of the event is clear, even if our ability to make complete sense of it is not. This is so for a number of reasons.

One is that Josephus, a much later historian, places this event in the eighth year of Jehoiakim's reign. In addition, Jeremiah 46, 2, throws a wrench into things by referring to a battle between Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt as taking place in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim.

How can one be taking battle in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim when there's already been a hauling off of the best and brightest in the third year? What are we to make of this?

Well, obviously, I don't have time now as a sermon, not a lecture. We could go on it for half an hour. But I want you to be aware, these are important matters as we open the book.

[15 : 17] Obviously, Josephus didn't read Daniel or Jeremiah or if he did, he just discarded their work entirely. Obviously, every historian is only as good as the sources that they're working with.

They're in front of them at the time. Second, we do know that there are a number of final skirmishes between Babylon and Israel and that Israel's ultimate collapse is kind of extended over a range of years that even if we get our best hands on it, probably is a 20-year run between 605 or 8 all the way down to 586.

Calvin reconciles the dating discrepancy between Daniel and Jeremiah this way, quote, the city was first taken in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim and some nobles of the royal line, among them Daniel and his friends, were led away as a sort of token of triumph.

Later, when Jehoiakim had rebelled, he was treated far more harshly as Jeremiah had foretold. Hence, Daniel had already been taken while Jeremiah or Jehoiakim still held the kingdom even if it was as a vassal of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Now, commentators have wrestled with this complexity and they will continue to do so even after this sermon. Putting the complexities of the date aside, two things stand out, the defeat of Israel's king and the displacement of her people.

[16 : 51] And these two things, by all human appearances, should alarm you as you begin reading. If those two things stand, the king is defeated, the worship is displaced, if those circumstances mark the end, then they mark the end not only of a king or a kingdom, but of the promises of God to save a people for himself and through them all the families of the earth.

The hope that this is not the case is hidden in the text. I want you to see this. It's the simple solitary literary line, and the Lord gave.

Do you see it there at verse 2? Almost overwhelmed by the strength of all the activity of Nebuchadnezzar and what's happening on the human stage, but there it is.

The narrator quietly indicating, and the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand.

That subtle phrase, planted in the soil of verse 2, provides the point of emphasis for the writer. That's what he wants embedded in the mind of the reader, and that's what I want embedded in your mind as a listener.

[18 : 20] I want you to know that when catastrophe struck Israel's king and the kingdom, it was God, not Nebuchadnezzar, who was even in that, moving the wheel of human history to accomplish his eternal purpose for his king and his kingdom.

And God gave. That's the word of comfort. that's supposed to make the reader who finds themselves waiting on the arrival of God's promises at rest.

And the Lord gave. Think about what that would have meant for the first readers. Everything seemed lost. Life seemed not so much worth living.

Yet here, by verse 2, reminded that God is working his purpose out, his wonders to perform. And he's doing so on the world stage.

This is the Christian, the biblical understanding of human history. that God is fulfilling his promises, that God removes kings and he sets up kings.

[19 : 44] That when Daniel made that wayfaring march, he rested in the hands of God. He leadeth me, he leadeth me. By his own hand, he leadeth me.

Isaiah will sound the same post-exilic note. chapter 40 verse 1, comfort, comfort, oh my people. Jesus will arrive and say, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

This rolling word that God is at work on the world stage when all the activity makes him a hidden solitary line needed to be pointed out by a narrator.

The Western Confession of Faith articulates it this way, God, the great creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

And the Lord gave. And so, as you get up today and you get ready to walk through this week, and some of you are fearful, the events on the world stage, whether it be Syria, or the U.S., Russia, Iran, Egypt, welcome to Daniel.

[21 : 33] The Lord is working his purpose out. It moves from kings and kingdoms to introducing the leading characters of the book, verses 3-7, Daniel and his four friends.

All of the narrative that follows will begin to let you know that not only is God behind things at this great macro level, but that every individual has an instrumental part to play.

In other words, it's filled with particular purposes for the lives of men and women who feel displaced and are wondering why he's placed them at this place, at this time, with this work to do.

Evidently, those in verses 3-7 were carried off to Babylon, selected for their learning as well as their good looks.

What's interesting to note is that their deportation was meant to siphon off the intellectual capital of Israel. They were now an occupied state, and they were siphoned off in ways that would further the wisdom and the reach of Babylon.

[22 : 54] These four are actually given new names. They're enrolled at a pagan secular university. They attend the University of Babylon, where they would receive the best education the world could offer.

And while there, it's their affections for God that remain intact, and their actions in the world on behalf of Babylon that shape it for good.

And in part, this is because these four grasped that they were at home in Babylon. Babylon. And they knew that assimilation has its limits.

Look at the second part of the way the narrative unfolds. It moves from kings and kingdoms and the leading characters to verses 8 to 16, a conflict in the king's court.

There's a turn in the development of the narrative at verse 8. There's a retelling of an early incident of testing and resolve. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.

[24 : 18] Therefore, he asked the chief of eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. A couple things I want to say about this section, this middle part of the opening chapter.

These four were not religious separatists. They went to a secular school, bore the stigma of having been given secular names, and there was nothing in the account that would suggest they had an iconoclast bone in their body.

By that I mean they weren't trying to blow up Babylon. They weren't out to make a point. even their approach to the chief of eunuchs on the question of food is carried out in an incredibly respectful way.

These are the kinds of young men and women needed today. Those who have strong commitments to Christ. Those who are fully engaged profitably, eagerly in the world.

And those who have the wisdom to know the limits of assimilation. What grows this kind of person? Don't overlook the importance of childhood training.

[25 : 48] From the biblical record, it would appear that these four privileged youths spent all their formative years growing up under a different king. Not Jehoiakim, under whom they were finally hauled off at about the age of 18, after he had only reigned for three years.

Rather, Josiah. Josiah. Josiah was a king that surpassed Asa, Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat in godly zeal and influence.

Second Kings 22 and 23 provide the nature of his rule. These guys were sons of nobility raised in his house.

He repaired the temple. He recovered the law. He began to have public readings of God's word. He called for repentance.

He led reform. He put the word at the center. He got rid of ungodly priests. He restored the celebration of the Passover.

[26 : 55] And he did it while Daniel and these three were being reared by their parents under his tutelage. That's where they come from. the kind of resolve you see in these four in this early incident in the king's court comes from the rich fertile soil of a childhood under a great and godly king and oh I want to meet their parents.

I want to meet their dads even. People of resolve are fashioned.

They're made. They don't simply appear. At least not very often. let me say a word.

This is our commitment as a church in this day to raise a generation capable of loving the world living in the world and remaining fruitful for God in the world under the wisdom of knowing how to follow him.

I say it every time for 15 years a child is baptized or dedicated. I quote Dabney. You know the education of children for God is the most important business done on earth.

[28 : 32] I mean it. Holy Trinity Church if you're a parent you're a dad begin rearing your children in the instruction of the fear of the Lord.

this is why we write stuff like family devotionals as poor as they might be. What they do is they put a family at the dinner table with a parent opening the Bible and saying we're going to read God's word and you're going to hear it from me.

You're going to hear it from me not just your Sunday school teacher not just the pastor it's going to come from my home my table I'm going to lead I'm going to be in church I'm going to be with my children I'm going to teach them how to be attentive when they're out of line I'm going to take initiative I'm going to train I'm going to nurture because this is the generation that you want to bring to the world that's why people volunteer in Kid City they're not babysitting back there in the back hall somewhere those are the people that are going to be old and they're going to look at those guys and say I knew you were like this and I taught you in 8th grade or 3rd grade or 2nd grade and the kid's going to be clueless what do you mean you taught me in 3rd grade and how are you doing today I'm following Jesus yeah that's what they're doing you want in on that we need a generation dare to be a

Daniel isn't that the way the thing goes dare to be a Daniel I heard Alistair Begg do it once I can't do it with the Scottish accent his Scottish accent alone is probably worth 15 grand a year is my guess I'm sure his speaking gigs are better paying than mine dare to be a Daniel dare to stand alone dare to hold a purpose firm dare to make it known you know should have the offering after that one hey let me bring it up a notch let me go from the kids to the collegians this is your hour some of you in this neighborhood you're at one of the finest universities in the world and not only do you need to have comfort that God is walking before you and in it all you need strength to have the commitments to know what to let roll off and what to hold on to be fully engaged and yet know the limits of assimilation and for

Daniel and these guys it came down to one thing I'm going to stay clean I mean that's the simple idea of the word defile probably relates to some understanding of ceremonial law they didn't want to be unclean they didn't want to do what God didn't want to do I mean it's possible that the food and the wine was offered to Bel and you know the pagan gods and then it came to their table next and that freaked them out I don't know whether it was a matter of actual law or conscience but their conscience even so and your conscience is more important than that which can be called right or wrong and they guarded it they began to feel this isn't right I don't belong here I can't do this I can't share this table and yet remain faithful to my understanding of who God is and they did it and you can do it and we need you to do it

[32 : 55] Winston Churchill's autobiography he regrets if you know anything about Churchill he's just up he's a bulldog if ever there was one he regrets that he didn't have a great university education but his regret was tempered by his observation of how most college men and women waste their time this is what Churchill said but now I pity undergraduates when I see what frivolous lives many of them lead in the midst of precious fleeting opportunity what's the emphasis what does the narrator want you to know as you look at that second section 8 to 16 it's right there in verse 9 and God gave Daniel favor and compassion that when when they had the resolve to live a life that would please

God they gained strength to fulfill that commitment and God honored it by throwing down upon them the chesed love of a Babylonian chief of eunuchs and he worked with them love that that's the intended application that's what sustains this kind of person God's favor goes with them when they determine to walk with God it's the second time now hidden in the text a simple solitary literary line and God gave first time round it gave comfort that he's in control of the macro things in the world stage this time round it gives strength for commitment even in the things that pertain to your life this week you are at home in

Babylon just keep clean no defiling of self from kings kingdoms and leading characters to a conflict in the king's court 17 to the end the outcomes for those who remain clean what encouraging news here at the conclusion look at the three outcomes verse 17 facility and learning verse 18 and 19 favor with the king verse 21 Daniel becomes a fixture in the court just a quick word on each facility and learning it says they had skill in all literature and wisdom and

Daniel was given understanding in all visions and dreams in our day for probably too long there was a retreat from the fold of secular institutions among Christian believing communities particularly institutions of higher learning and it led to a withdrawal from a commitment to a liberal arts education in a world class setting and increasingly alternate educational systems were employed which ironically became a closed system that kept the world out with a few notable exceptions Christians of course the consequence though is that there are generations of Christians who are not only unfamiliar with the makeup of the heart and mind of their non-Christian counterparts but a slew who are content to live out their entire lives without them and when that happens a church turns inward and when a church turns inward it becomes isolated and over time she becomes an institution that's lost its calling and therefore has no mission so it doesn't surprise me that in the last few years there's a huge movement to churches being missional as if somehow we have to reacquaint ourselves with the world in which we live but I thought we already lived in this world not so if we retreated from it and these young men were in the mix of it all taking their classes and understanding world views that were completely different from the one in which they had been schooled under

Josiah and they excelled in it all God gave them facility in learning and in wisdom then he gave them a favor with the king I mean by the time they took the oral exams wow they passed with flying colors so much so that they were useful in the world want to be useful in the world be a citizen of the world you're not just a Christian you're a citizen why do we want to volunteer in our schools because we're Christians maybe but sometimes because I'm a citizen

[39 : 13] I'm in I'm at home I'm here why give myself to the pursuit of learning because what I do I feel God's pleasure and in the midst of all that engagement you become useful for Daniel look at the brackets there a 70 year run of usefulness in Babylon you know the first book I read on this kind of thing that got me moving and I'm about done Harry Blumeyers writes a book in the 1950s on the Christian mind to kind of get us moving I'm a sophomore in my college years on a front lawn at Wheaton College when Charles

Malick delivers live a dedicatory address which becomes called the two tasks and it's a return to the Christian community that if you merely win the soul of the world and lose the mind of the world you've lost the world and it was that kind of jump start for me I didn't understand half of what he said I was just trying to stay eligible to play ball but the 43% of what I did understand shaped my life gave me my commitments placed me in some measure here today Mark Noel teaches history I had him everything I had in history was from Noel who then went to Notre Dame where he is today and he ends up writing a book later called The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind and what all of these are doing from the 50s and the late 70s and early 80s and the 90s and today is saying wake up be at home in Babylon and here's the point of the drill have confidence that he'll use you there it is hidden again verse 17

God gave third time in the text the Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand be comforted God gave favor to Daniel when he lived according to his resolute standards and he'll give strength to you to fulfill your commitments and God gave them all the skills necessary to be of service to him and service to the world be confident well enough from me our heavenly father strengthen us this week to engage with life in all its fullness with joy that we might serve you for those today who need your comfort given the fears on the world stage we pray that you would grant it to them for those who need strength to fulfill their commitments and vows to you give them strength to fulfill them for those who need the confidence to understand that you can and will use them do that as well in

Christ's name Amen