

God is Faithful

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our attention now to the book of Daniel. We're going to spend our time this summer in this book. It is one of my favorites, as you can probably know, based upon one of the names of my children.

Daniel just shines from the pages of the Old Testament as one who is devoted to God. And what may not be clear on the surface of this text that while it may be speaking about the events that are happening in Babylon, it may be speaking of this character, Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Really, behind all of this is the message of God. Behind all of this is the testimony of God's sovereign hand to preserve His people, to allow the light of Israel to shine among the nations and to capture a heart.

I believe we're going to find in Daniel chapter 4 of God working instrumentally through these young men and the testimony of their faith in God to be a model and a witness of the gospel, as it were, a testimony of who God is, the God of heaven, in drawing Nebuchadnezzar and his subjects to faith in Christ, faith in God.

Open, if you would, please, to Daniel chapter 1. If you're using the Pew Bible, it's on page 737. I've often wondered if, like Timothy, Daniel also had a mother or a father who was instrumental in building faith in him and establishing him for this special purpose.

[1 : 59] This morning we're going to see the faithfulness of God shining through this passage today in Daniel chapter 1, verses 1 to 7. So if you're there, please follow along with me as I read just the first verse.

Daniel chapter 1, verse 1. It says this, In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Now on the surface, of course, the events that are unfolding in front of us are the names of a king or kingdoms and the situation that is taking place.

But hidden behind this is the history of words and the history of God's testimony and his faithfulness for his people. I just want to draw your attention to this as we begin our time today.

We see, first of all, that God is faithful to give his word. God is faithful to give his word. Of course, we're no longer in first century Israel.

[3 : 05] As we were studying through the gospel of Luke. We're no longer even in Israel or Jerusalem. We're not speaking the Greek language. We're in Babylon here.

This is our new situation. And this is some 600 years before Christ will walk the earth. And about 400 years after King David reigned as king.

We find ourselves in this book of Daniel. Daniel, Daniel, which is kind of a mix of history and prophecy. The first six chapters are devoted to kind of the story of Daniel and the life of he and his friends.

All those familiar stories that we have grown up learning as children. But then the last half of this book is about prophecy.

The apocalypse. It's about these vivid pictures of future kingdoms. We're going to center our study during this summer just in the first six chapters of this book so we can draw attention to Daniel and his faith in God and how God works through Daniel to draw the heart of a king to himself.

[4 : 19] Daniel is the author of Daniel which may seem a bit confusing in the first six chapters because he refers to himself kind of in the third person but then as we move our way to chapter 7 through 12 we'll begin to see more often that Daniel refers to himself in the first person.

He uses I and me. In Daniel chapter 12 verse 4 we find this statement but you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end.

Daniel as the author of this book. He's writing about 600 years before Christ and he focuses his attention in these first couple of verses on the situation of Israel and the situation in history.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. Who was Jehoiakim? And I just want to provide just a quick and brief introduction to try to get us into the flow of this narrative.

2 Kings 23 36 to 37 provides just a commentary on this one of the last kings of Judah. It says Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he began to reign and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.

[5 : 30] His mother's name was Zebediah the daughter of Padiah and Ruma and he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord according to all that his fathers had done.

I just want to draw your attention to those last two phrases. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He rebelled against God. He did not set his affection on the God of heaven on the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

He decided to follow his own course which was against the standard that God had set. But it was something that his fathers had done. It was part of the course of the final years of the kings of Judah the rebellion against God.

So we find for Jehoiakim's son who's Jehoiakin we find this commentary in 2 Kings 24 verses 13 and 16.

So Nebuchadnezzar he carried off all the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord which Solomon king of Israel had made as the Lord had foretold.

[6 : 42] He carried away all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor 10,000 captives and all the craftsmen and the smiths none remained except the poorest people of the land.

And he carried away Jehoiakim to Babylon the king's mother the king's wives the officials and the chief men of the land he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And the king of Babylon brought captives to Babylon all the men of valor 7,000 and the craftsmen and the metal workers a thousand all of them strong and fit for war.

The best of the best were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon and Daniel would have been part of that first wave of captivity around 597 B.C.

Why did all of this happen? Well it happened because of what we find in verse 20. For because of the anger of the Lord it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence and Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

This hadn't been this hadn't happened for no reason it happened because of the explicit word of God in sending prophets to Jerusalem and to Judah to warn them about his standard.

[8 : 04] This passage is a little lengthy and so I want to encourage you to turn to 2 Chronicles with me. 2 Chronicles 36 beginning in verse 12 if you're using the Pew Bible it's on page 388 it would be beneficial for you to see this for yourself so you can even underline the portions of scripture that deal with the faithfulness of God as it relates to giving his word.

Notice in verse 12 it says speaking of the kings of Judah he did what was right excuse me what was evil in the sight of the Lord is God he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke from the mouth of the Lord he also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who made him swear by God he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord the God of Israel now drop down to verse 15 the Lord the God of their fathers sent persistently to them by his messengers because he had compassion on his people in his dwelling place but they kept mocking the messengers of God despising the words his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people until there was no remedy God faithfully sent his word

God faithfully consistently generation after generation prophet after prophet warned his people to obey and so what we find in this first couple of verses that Jehoiakim and the people who were living in Judah and Jerusalem are not just captives and not just subjects of circumstance but under the divine hand of God are experiencing now the consequences of this faithful word of God that he has sent them over and over and over again God had given faithful warnings to his people God was a faithful God to send his message through his messengers and as we turn to verse 2 and 7 of Daniel chapter 1 now coming back to Daniel not only is God faithful to give his word but we find that he's faithful to keep his word and we're going to find that in our passage in a number of different ways

God is faithful to keep his word the very first picture of God's faithfulness is found in verse 2 notice 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 how is God faithful in verse 2 how would you fill in this blank well God is faithful to punish his people God is faithful to bring punishment on his people we can rejoice in a God who is faithful to keep his word even when that word leads to our own discipline and God is setting the trajectory God is helping his people understand if he is faithful to keep his word to punish his people he will also be faithful to keep his word to bring back his people back to the land of Judah which is what's going to happen in 70 years from the beginning of this captivity God is establishing himself as a faithful God to keep his word and he does this by punishing his people this word the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand is the word delivered it's the word to describe God giving them over he is the one who is sovereignly involved in the events that we find on the pages of Daniel chapter one it wasn't Nebuchadnezzar's military might or brilliance that brought about the downfall of Jerusalem it wasn't his prestige or power or strategic genius that allowed him to conquer the known world it was the hand of God and by his power permitting Nebuchadnezzar to do these things there are details that we don't have time to cover this morning but it's not a coincidence that we find in our passage this morning a reference to the land of [12:38] Shinar notice that in the second half of verse 2 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 last time this word was used the reference to Shinar goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 11 and if you remember the details that take place there in Shinar this is where the people assembled to build a tower to God in a place of Babel this is the birthplace of Babylon this is the location where the first showdown really of a religious people who were internally religious and seeking to get to the God of their own making are matched and confronted by the one true God the God who helps them understand his supremacy helps them come to terms with who he really is as the God of all here we are again back in

Shinar where God is going to demonstrate his faithfulness his faithfulness to a people not only to punish but also to preserve and that's what we find in verses 3 to 5 God not only punishes his people God preserves his people the grace of God will be so prominent as we read through these first six chapters of Daniel I trust it will encourage your heart Judah at this point is now taken captive 10,000 captives from Jerusalem are making their way or have made their way to Babylon they're under discipline but through the narrative of Daniel we're going to find God's loyal subjects are blessed they're thriving in the land Daniel and his friends are thriving in a place of discipline that's a picture of God's preservation on them we see the Lord in his hand written across especially this first chapter let me just briefly draw your attention to it we saw it already in verse 2 where the Lord gave but drop down to verse 9 we're going to pick this up next week and we'll see and God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs God is working instrumentally God is the one who's over all God is the one who's moving the hands and the activities of those who are responsible then in Daniel chapter 1 verse 17 notice as for these four God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom and Daniel and understanding and all visions and dreams God is preserving his people these descendants of Abraham God is setting his affection on them God is blessing them and allowing them to flourish even in this land of captivity of course he does this according to his word

Jeremiah 23 verse 3 God states to Jeremiah I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and I will bring them back to their fold and they shall be fruitful and multiply God had set his people apart he was preserving them for himself and we see the way in which God is working through Daniel and through his three friends to preserve them in this place so that he can draw them back as well as many others as we'll find in the book of Ezra we look at this testimony of these young men and we're challenged by their courage as they stand for God but written behind all of this is the hand of God who is instrumentally working through these young men but notice the shift in language that takes place once we get to verse three this hand of God will now work its way alongside the hand of men this assumed power of men as Nebuchadnezzar will exert his supposed authority we're going to see this interplay not only through this chapter but also through the remaining chapters the king wants to exert himself the king wants to establish that he's the authority and we find throughout the book of Daniel that God will demonstrate that he is the one true transcendent sovereign and ultimate authority over life but in verse three we find how this plays out we find then the king commanded Ashpenaz his chief eunuch to bring some of the people of Israel both of the royal family and nobility used 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 in the language of the [17 : 59] Chaldeans then in verse five so then 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 king Nebuchadnezzar seeking to establish himself as the authority of Babylon as the authority of the known world we're going to see that authority the true authority the authority of God who plays in and through the rest of the story throughout Daniel it didn't matter that the king commanded it didn't matter that the king appointed God is the one who is working instrumentally behind the scenes to cause the results that he wants to cause and to put his men in place the city of Babylon was a foreboding city unlike anything that Jews had ever seen before Babylon was the largest city in the known world covering about four square miles this massive river the river

Euphrates would flow through this old city and of course the tradition of the hanging gardens one of the seven wonders of the world was supposedly there in Babylon the walls of the city were massive so that Greek historians claimed that Babylon surpassed in wonder any city in the known world the walls he said were 56 miles in circumference 80 feet thick and 320 feet high now that is likely an exaggeration but it gives you the sense of the foreboding and intimidation of this structure in the minds of those who lived during that day it was an impenetrable city it was a tribute to the power and the supposed glory of Babylon and of Nebuchadnezzar as the king so to be in that city as a captive and then to be given this unique opportunity to stand in the court of the king to be an influence for an empire was an unimaginable honor

Nebuchadnezzar issues this command selects these group of captives and notice here at the end of verse 3 and 4 what are the criteria to bring the people of Israel both of the royal family and of nobility which means that he is gathering from the captives of Israel and he is gathering those specifically from Judah and those who were of nobility which means that Daniel and his three friends were likely from the royal family were likely a part of the nobility there in Judah the fact that they were young men is a designation for those who were boys and educated in the land about 14 years of age Nebuchadnezzar wanted these young men to be teachable to be pliable to be willing to learn new things Daniel and his friends were also required to be in good physical health and the word that's used here is without defect which reminds us of the same criteria that was used for priests they could not have a blemish or defect so

Daniel so Daniel and his friends were without blemish without defect it speaks of their intelligence showing aptitude not just the the the expanse of knowledge that they had but their aptitude and ability to learn and to retain new things they were quick to understand of course they would learn to speak and write in the languages of the day in Hebrew and Aramaic and Persian one might wonder why these descriptions are given to us in the text and I think again it points to the hand of God in preserving these men in setting them apart for himself it said at the time of the siege of Nebuchadnezzar coming against Judah in Jerusalem there were as many as 380,000 Jews that lived in Judah and Jerusalem so estimates of about 80,000 to 100,000 actually living in Jerusalem and if you remember how many captives were taken we're talking about 10,000 captives which is about two and a half percent two and a half percent of those who were living in Judah in Jerusalem that were actually taken as captives to Babylon and then of all of those who were selected out of the captives of Judah and Jerusalem to stand before the court only four are given to us as those who remained loyal and committed to God those who met the criteria those who I believe God selected and rose up and promoted so they could carry out his purposes in the courts of Nebuchadnezzar God is behind the events of what we read and through this we see that God is preserving his men for himself and finally we find in verse 6 and 7 that God places his people God preserves his people he punishes his people but he also places his people and we see that happening here in verses 6 and 7 notice with me among those were

[23 : 41] Daniel Hananiah Mishael and Azariah of the tribe of Judah and the chief of the eunuchs gave them names Daniel he called Belteshazzar Hananiah he called Shadrach Mishael he called Meshach and Azariah he called Abednego we find that God has placed his people his young men in the right place at the right time and each of their names draw attention to the God that they serve Daniel whose name means God has judged Hananiah whose name means Yahweh has been gracious Mishael who says who is what God is and Azariah whose name means Yahweh has helped even in their names there is this testimony of the God with whom they serve directing attention to him I believe that God has done this for a reason and one of the biggest reasons why

I believe God has done this is not only to save a remnant for himself but again in fulfillment to a promise that he had given hundreds of years before to a man named Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 verse 3 God tells Abraham I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed or all the nations shall be blessed it's just amazing to see the the work of God in instrumentally in the events and circumstances of the world and how God is using even discipline to allow his people to move to a land 800 miles away this heathen empire and he places instrumentally Daniel and his three friends to be there as a means of them seeing

God firsthand of hearing about the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob of seeing his power of coming to understand that he truly is the God of heaven which means he's he's overall he's supreme he's ultimate using Daniel and his friends as a means by which the nations might be drawn in to relationship with God God has given us the opportunity as well as those who love God have been called into relationship with God wherever we are whether you're a mom whether you are in the workplace or at home God will use you and can use you not only to help raise children but to instrumentally speak and declare the wonder of who God is wherever you are dads your responsibility to train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the

Lord but also wherever you are to use the opportunities that you have with integrity to demonstrate your commitment to God the ethic that you have which comes from God himself the way in which you work and I'm reminded of us working heartily as to the Lord and not to men so that people recognize there's something different about us we can share the gospel not only through our words but also through our life God has placed every one of you just where he wants you to be are we taking advantage of the opportunities those places where you live those places where you work those places students where you go to school does your life reflect a commitment to the faithful God and a desire to demonstrate in your own heart reflecting his faithfulness through dependability and obedience to his word may God help us as we seek to direct people's attention to the wonder of the God that we serve and to invite them to enjoy that same relationship that comes through faith in Christ and forgiveness of sins oh Lord

I pray that you would help us thank you for the example of Daniel thank you for the words that we read this morning from this passage thank you for the testimony of the fact that you are over all and through all and in all situations help us to trust you moment by moment and to take advantage of the opportunities that you give to us to proclaim the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light may we call attention to our faithful God through faithful lives we pray in Jesus name amen God bless you have a great week miracle!

[28 : 58] miracle