

DANIEL: INTRODUCTION



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Daniel: Introduction

The book of Daniel is the shortest of the “major” prophets, but its importance in the story of redemption is no less than that of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Daniel’s story is set during the captivity of God’s people in Babylon, a period that came upon them as an act of God’s judgment. Daniel lived through the entire period of the captivity, and his book reminds us of the covenant faithfulness of God, and unfolds important ideas about the coming Kingdom of our Lord.

We begin by considering the background of Daniel’s book, and from the beginning, we will see the good hand of God guiding the affairs of His people – even through judgment.

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We hope you find this study of Hosea instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 The Lord and Nebuchadnezzar

Introduction

The book of Daniel is set during the period of Israel's (Judah and Jerusalem) captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in 589 BC, and finally breached the wall and captured the city in 586 BC. The writer of 2 Kings tells us what happened next.

Read [2 Kings 24.1-16](#).

Read *Daniel 1.1, 2*.

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.

Think it Through

1. What happened to Jerusalem? How must it have felt to be living in Jerusalem at that time? According to Daniel 1.2, Who was ultimately back of this tragedy?
2. Why did this happen? What does this tell us about God (cf. Heb. 12.3-11)? Why does He do this?

Meditate

“The fact that Jehoiakim is recorded to have been given over shows that it was not a victory for the might of his enemies but rather it was of the will of the Lord.” *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

“For I *am* the LORD, I do not change...” Malachi 3.6

You are the Lord of all chastening, O God, and You do not change. As I think about my walk with You, and the state of the Church in our country...

Pray

How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

Psalm 137.4-6

Psalm 137.4-6 (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak*)

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

If ever praise forsake my tongue, if Zion's ways no more be sung,
If greater joy by me be found, my lips destroy, no more to sound.

2 A Bitter and Hasty Nation

Introduction

In the book of Daniel, God reveals much about Himself, and about His power to exert His presence and power among even the most violent and godless people. Daniel's story should encourage us to hope in God more fervently, and trust Him more completely, for His power to do good is greater than all the evil works and ways of men – like those of the armies of Babylon, a bitter and hasty nation, as God showed them to Habakkuk.

Read [Habakkuk 1.5-11](#).

Read *Lamentations 1.1-3*.

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who was great among the nations!
The princess among the provinces
Has become a slave!
She weeps bitterly in the night,
Her tears are on her cheeks;
Among all her lovers
She has none to comfort her.
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.
Judah has gone into captivity,
Under affliction and hard servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
She finds no rest;
All her persecutors overtake her in dire straits.

Think it Through

1. Jeremiah was reflecting on the aftermath of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in his Lamentations. Keep in mind Habakkuk's description of these people. What were the effects of Nebuchadnezzar's victory on the people of Jerusalem? Can you imagine what that must have been like? How would those people have felt, as they were carried away from their homes to captivity and slavery in a bitter and hasty nation like Babylon?
2. Why was it important to God that His people be brought low like this? Do you think God still does this sort of thing? Can you think of any examples? Is there any warning for us in what happened to the people of Jerusalem and Judah under Nebuchadnezzar?

Meditate

“And so we, too, who in our lives are sick with shameful lusts and reprehensible excesses and other inflammatory effects of the passions, need the Savior. And he administers not only mild but also stringent medicines.” *Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD)*

“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?” Hebrews 12.7

Lord, let Your Word warn me of sin, remind me of Your love, and put me in fear of Your chastening, so that...

Pray

O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed,
Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!

Psalm 137.8

Psalm 137.7, 8 (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak*)

Remember, Lord Your boasting foes, who hate Your Word and visit woes
On your dear sheep that they may die: Cause them to weep and mourn and sigh.

3 Sin and Shame

Introduction

But why did God send His people to captivity in Babylon? Because they refused to obey His Law and to trust in Him, rather than in their own wits or the ways of their neighbors. God is serious about obedience, and when His people are not, He will take steps to remind them of what He expects. Amos summarizes the repeated sins (three transgressions, and four) of the people of Judah.

[Read Amos 2.4, 5.](#)

Read Daniel 9.3-7.

Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.”

Think it Through

1. Judah was sent to captivity in Babylon because they failed in loving God and keeping His commandments (v. 5). Does God expect the same of His people today (cf. Matt. 22.34-40; Rom. 3.31)? God’s people in Judah first neglected God’s Law, then ignored it, then transgressed it freely. Do you see anything like this pattern among Christians today? Explain.
2. The prophets – like Amos – were sent as God’s agents of grace, to remind the people of His Law, to indict them for their waywardness, and to hold out the promise of forgiveness and renewal if they would return to the Lord. But the people of Judah ignored them (v. 6). Daniel saw this conduct as shameful (v. 7). Why? Are there prophets among the people of God today? What is the nature of their calling?

Meditate

“Although Daniel has already received manifold grace due to his faith and innocence and although he has received quite a reputation before the Lord in regard to his virtues and praises, he strives with fasting to be worthy of God; he puts on sackcloth and ashes and makes confession with tears.” *Cyprian of Carthage (fl. 248-258AD)*

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Luke 13.2, 3

Lord, do I need to repent of anything? Does my church? Do we as a generation of Your people? O Lord, before Your judgment falls...

Pray

How shall we sing the LORD’s song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*

If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

Psalm 137.4-6

Psalm 137.4-6 (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak*)

No songs have we of joy to sing. Our enemy, to taunt and sting,
Bids us rejoice, as they oppress: We have no voice to praise or bless.

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

4 Covenant People Still

Introduction

The purpose of God's chastening is correction and restoration. God sent His people into captivity in Babylon, but He did not intend them to languish there. They were still His covenant people, blessed of God to be a blessing to the nations. A time of restoration would come, and His people must be always preparing for this, as the prophet Jeremiah explained.

Read [Jeremiah 29.1-14](#).

Read *Daniel 1.3-7*.

Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of *that time* they might serve before the king. Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

Think it Through

1. God instructed His people to fulfill His covenant, even while they were in the stressful and inconvenient circumstances of captivity. Meditate on Genesis 1.26-28 and 12.1-3. God's covenant people are His covenant people regardless of where they are or what's happening around or to them. How would Jeremiah's letter to the captives have reminded them of this? How can we remind ourselves of this every day?
2. Meditate on Proverbs 21.1. God moved Nebuchadnezzar to take His people into captivity (Dan. 1.1, 2). But God commanded His captive people to fulfill His covenant and bless their captors (Jer. 29.1-14). How can you see from Daniel 1.3-7 that God works to enable His people to fulfill what He expects of them? How do you see God doing this in your life? From early on in the book of Daniel, God reminds us that He is in control, and His covenant and rule will not fail. Explain.

Meditate

"Now all this happened just as Isaiah had predicted to Hezekiah ...: 'And some of your own sons will become slaves, yes eunuchs, in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. Hebrews 13.20, 2`

Thank You, Father, that Your covenant is everlasting, Your promises will never fail, Your Word is utterly reliable and entirely true, and therefore I...

Pray

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.
We hung our harps

Upon the willows in the midst of it...
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

Psalm 137.1, 2, 5, 6

Psalm 137.1, 2, 4-6 (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak*)

We sit beside the waters deep, in broken pride, to mourn and weep
For Zion's woes and all our sin: How great our foes, without, within!

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

5 Bread of Shame and Glory

Introduction

Israel's captivity in Babylon was meant to humble the people of God, to remind them of their calling as His covenant people, and to prepare their hearts to serve Him as they should once their captivity had come to an end. And God would glorify Himself throughout this 70-year period by daily reminding His people of their sin and His gracious and unfailing Word. Ezekiel explained how that would happen.

Read [Proverbs 23,1-3](#) and [Ezekiel 4,7-13](#).

Read *Daniel 1.8-14*.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who *are* your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king." So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

Think it Through

1. What an opportunity this posed for Daniel and his friends! While the rest of God's people languished in conditions of captivity and deprivation, they would eat like kings. Except that Daniel knew the wisdom of God, what Ezekiel had written, and why God intended this. He determined to submit to God's Word. He may not have been able to make bread, or to bake it over his own dung, but he could refuse the king's portions and get as close to what God commanded as possible. Why would Daniel do this? What do we learn from this about Daniel's view of God's Word? How should we be encouraged by this?
2. Meditate on Jeremiah 15.16, Matthew 4.1-4, and 1 Corinthians 10.31. How would God be glorified in Daniel's choice of cuisine? In what ways is reading and meditation in Scripture like eating (check out [this great poem by C. S. Lewis](#))? How do you expect God to be glorified in your eating and drinking today?

Meditate

"For those who love God do not seek after the God of all in just one place, but even in the midst of this misfortune they worshiped as if in the house of the Creator." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;
I have treasured the words of His mouth
More than my necessary *food*. Job 23.12

Father, I want to be true of me what was true of Daniel, Jeremiah, Jesus, and Job – I want Your Word to be to me...

Pray

How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill*!
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—

If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

Psalm 137.4-6

Psalm 137.4-6 (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak*)

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

If ever praise forsake my tongue, if Zion's ways no more be sung,
If greater joy by me be found, my lips destroy, no more to sound.

6 A Future and a Hope

Introduction

God would not abandon His people in Babylon. He appointed 70 years for their captivity, at the end of which He promised to restore them to their own country. His chastening is always only for a season (Ps. 30.5), and His promises remain for us to enjoy, once chastening has accomplished its purpose. Jeremiah explained this in his letter to the captives, and Daniel claimed that promise, 70 years later, in passionate prayer.

Read [Jeremiah 29.10-14](#).

Read *Daniel 9.1-3*.

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years *specified* by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

Think it Through

1. Daniel endured all 70 years of Israel's captivity in Babylon, and we will see that he made the most of the time God gave him. But in the seventieth year – perhaps when Daniel was in his mid-80s – he read God's promise through Jeremiah. Why did this lead Daniel to turn immediately to prayer? What can we learn from Daniel about the relationship between prayer and the promises of God? Are your prayers guided by God's promises? Explain.

2. From the beginning of His sending them into captivity, God promised to restore His people to their country. Meditate on Psalm 126, which was probably written before the captivity in Babylon, but anticipating it. How might a faithful Israelite have applied this psalm to his situation in Babylon, given what we read in Jeremiah 29.1-14? What would he have understood to be his duty in “sowing” despite his “tears”? To what “restoration” would he have been looking? Apply this psalm and Israel's captivity in Babylon to the state of God's Church today. What counsel or guidance do these offer?

Meditate

“Jeremiah had predicted seventy years for the desolation of the temple, at the end of which the people would again return to Judea and build the temple and the city of Jerusalem. However, this fact did not render Daniel careless but rather encouraged him to pray that God might through his supplications fulfill that which he had graciously promised.” *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

You are my King, O God;
Command victories for Jacob.
Through You we will push down our enemies;
Through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us. Psalm 44.4, 5

Father, that Jesus and His Church have many enemies in our day is clear. We must not cover before them, but remember Your promises, and every day...

Pray

How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.

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If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

If ever praise forsake my tongue, if Zion's ways no more be sung,
If greater joy by me be found, my lips destroy, no more to sound.

7 Bitter Judgment

Introduction

For the vast majority of those taken away captive to Babylon, the experience must have been deeply affecting. Imagine being torn from your home, and watching it go up in flames as you are marched off to a distant land. All your possessions stolen. Your relationships destroyed, and your friends and family dispersed. Your traditions put on hold. All your neighbors laughing you to scorn. Live here. Do this. Remember you're a slave. And while you're at it, sing us a praise song or two, would you? Yeah, not likely.

Read [Jeremiah 25.8-11](#).

Read *Psalm 137*.

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.
We hung our harps
Upon the willows in the midst of it.
For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
And those who plundered us *requested* mirth,
Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill*!
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy.
Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Raze *it*, raze it,
To its very foundation!"
O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed,
Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!
Happy the one who takes and dashes
Your little ones against the rock!

Think it Through

1. Psalm 137 is an *imprecatory* psalm. That is, the psalmist pleads with God to bring harm and destruction to the enemies of His people. This psalm is particularly brutal in its imprecations. Imprecatory psalms can be difficult to understand, much less to embrace for use in our edification or prayers. How many different emotions can you identify in this psalm? How would you describe the state of mind and soul of the anonymous writer? Is God OK with that? Meditate on Matthew 5.43-45. Should we come to God in prayer when we feel this way? With what in mind? Explain.
2. Do you suppose Daniel was aware that many of his fellow captives felt like this? Could knowing this have affected his willingness to serve King Nebuchadnezzar (God's "servant" – Jer. 25.9)? Explain. Meditate on Ephesians 6.10-20. Should we pray imprecatory prayers against our great enemy? How might Psalm 137 guide you in this?

Meditate

“And in this way also the just give up to destruction all their enemies, which are their vices, so that they do not spare even the children, that is, the early beginnings and promptings of evil. In this sense also we understand the language of Psalm 137...” *Origen (185-254 AD)*

Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor
Who seek after my life;
Let those be turned back and brought to confusion
Who plot my hurt.
Let them be like chaff before the wind,
And let the angel of the LORD chase *them*.
Let their way be dark and slippery,
And let the angel of the LORD pursue them. Psalm 35.4-6

Lord, today I am involved in a relentless spiritual warfare. I need Your help, so that I may serve You well. I pray against the enemies of my soul, that...

Pray

Use Psalm 137 to pray for oppressed Christians everywhere. Put yourself in their place, and seek the grace of God to help them love their enemies, despite their sorrow, anger, shame, and fear. Pray also against the enemies of your soul, that God may bind and destroy them, so that you may be free of all their temptations and distractions.

Psalm 137 (*The Gift of Love: Though I May Speak*)

We sit beside the waters deep, in broken pride, to mourn and weep
for Zion's woes and all our sin: How great our foes, without, within!

No songs have we of joy to sing. Our enemy, to taunt and sting,
bids us rejoice, as they oppress: We have no voice to praise or bless.

How can we sing, exalt Your Name, or praises bring amid our shame?
If we forget Your Church's fame, O Lord, then let our hands grow lame.

If ever praise forsake my tongue, if Zion's ways no more be sung,
if greater joy by me be found, my lips destroy, no more to sound.

Remember, Lord Your boasting foes, who hate Your Word and visit woes
on your dear sheep that they may die: Cause them to weep and mourn and sigh.

How blest are You, our sovereign Lord, Who judgment true shall soon accord
to all who seek Your sheep to kill. Preserve the meek who serve You still.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why was the deportation of Judah and Jerusalem necessary? What do we learn about God from this tragic episode of Israel's history?
2. What kind of people were the Babylonians? What must it have been like to be carried away into captivity by them?
3. How can we see that God intended His people to use this period of captivity for good?
4. In what ways is it evident that God was present with His people and caring for them, even as He brought them to judgment?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.