

DARE TO BE LIKE DANIEL

Thriving Servants – Silent Sovereignty

A Study through Daniel
Fall Series, 2023

Text: Isaiah 39:5-8; Daniel 1:1-21; 6:28

Isaiah 39:5-8

*Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “**Hear the word of the LORD of hosts:** ⁶ Behold, **the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left,** says the LORD. ⁷ And **some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs (“officials” per NASB) in the palace of the king of Babylon.**” ⁸ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”*

Daniel 1:2, 9, 17

*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. . . . And **God gave** Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs 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.*

Daniel 6:28

*So this **Daniel prospered** during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

The book of Daniel tells the fullest and most complete version of God’s big story in the Old Testament. It stretches back to the opening chapters of our Bible where God promised to send a “Son” given to Mankind to redeem an ancient race, reverse an ancient curse, and remove an ancient enemy. It looks forward to the end of days when the “Son of Man” comes to fulfill this promise by receiving authority, power, and dominion to establish a kingdom on earth that will be marked by justice and flavored by peace – a kingdom rule by Christ and given to the people who belong to Him – a kingdom that will never end!

And the first chapter in this majestic book introduces a book that might be the most important in content, most comprehensive in scope, most practical in application, most hope filled in outlook, and most instructive in example and revelation of all the books in the Old Testament!

This chapter explains who these Hebrews are, how they arrived at Babylon, and why they are there!

We meet three major characters that will dominate the rest of the book: A powerful, arrogant pagan king named Nebuchadnezzar; a faithful, humble servant named Daniel; and a silent but sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth named Yahweh!

As the book opens, we are immediately thrown into the midst of a massive crisis intended by the author to shake us up and disturb our theological perspective that we are forced face undeniable realities that drive us to ask important questions about the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God!

First, there is a historical crisis (1:1-2)

Second, there is a theological crisis:

Third, there is a moral crisis:

Finally, there is a personal crisis:

What are these four young men who were caught up in a crisis beyond their control – caused by the sins of others – supposed to do? How are they to navigate the challenges of wicked Babylon? How are they supposed to remain faithful to a God who, by all outward indicators and objective measures, appears to have not been faithful to them!

If Daniel could speak to us this morning, I think he would point us to five important responses that God produced in his life and in the lives of his three friends – the same responses that will help us thrive and prosper in our own day and age!

I. Enduring Patiently (1:1-2)

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, **Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.** ² 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.*

(Because History is orchestrated by Divine Sovereignty)

II. Living Faithfully (1:3-7)

*Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, **to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility,** ⁴ **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 language of the Chaldeans.** ⁵ 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.** ⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ **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.*

(As Royal Strategy and Authority meets Divine Sovereignty)

Nebuchadnezzar's strategy involved:

1. Relocating them to Babylon to be trained in the Babylonian language, culture, and religious wisdom (world-view).
2. Eating the king's food from the king's table – food that had been first dedicated to Nebuchadnezzar's patron god, Marduk and food that was ritually prohibited by the Torah.
3. Preparing them to serve in the political structure of the Babylonian Kingdom – advancing the king's purposes, overseeing his business, and establishing and enforcing his policies.
4. Receiving new names to reorient their religious identity and to show respect/deference to the religious structure of Babylon.

III. Obeying Humbly (1:8-16)

*But **Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself** with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. **Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.** ⁹ **And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,** ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your 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." ¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah,*

Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² “Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king’s food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see.” ¹⁴ **So he listened to them in this matter**, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ **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.** ¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

(Faithfulness Enabled and Sustained by Divine Sovereignty)

How did Daniel and his three friends thrive in such a spiritually dark and morally wicked environment?

The answer is simple – simple does not mean easy; it simply means that faithful living in Babylon was not complicated. It involved two basic things:

A. They Obeyed God Faithfully by performing His Word

- In the matter of the food they were asked to eat (1:5; 8)

B. They Served Nebuchadnezzar and his officials graciously

- In the matter of their names (1:4)
- In the matter of their education (1:17)
- In the matter of their language and speech (1:17)
- In the matter of their occupation and vocation (1:20)
- In the matter of their dress (3:21 – refers to the official standard dress of a Babylonian official)

IV. Serving Successfully (1:17-20)

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. ¹⁸ *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.* ¹⁹ *And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.* ²⁰ *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.*

(Obedience is Vindicated and Honored by Divine Sovereignty)

For the third time in this chapter, Daniel calls our attention to God's sovereign action by telling us that "God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams."

This is more than just the result of hard work, diligent study, and persistent learning – this is a supernaturally granted endowment of knowledge and skill in both the literature and wisdom of Babylon. The literature was vast – and all of it was infused with pagan religious philosophy. The wisdom of Babylon was the formal body of wisdom by which Nebuchadnezzar and his officials operated and by which they made all major decision.

To Daniel, God granted supernatural ability to do what none of the other magicians and enchanters could do – he really could penetrate the realm of God and get understanding and interpretation of visions and dreams!

And when they stood before Nebuchadnezzar to be tested and examined – they excelled far above all others in his kingdom!

God vindicated and honored His faithful servants by means of His quiet and invisible sovereignty.

V. Satisfied Fully (1:21)

*And Daniel was there **until the first year of King Cyrus.***

(Sustained, Blessed, and Satisfied by Divine Sovereignty)

This was the year that Cyrus issued a decree authorizing, commanding, and funding something Daniel had longed for and prayed for his entire life – the return of his people to the Land of Promise to re-establish and repopulate Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. That decree is mentioned in Ezra 1:1-11. Who know, perhaps one of the last official acts of Daniel, this ancient faithful servant of God and of Cyrus, was to encourage Cyrus to issue the decree and then perhaps to draft it into an official document – a portion of which is still preserved today in the clay tablet known as the Cyrus Cylinder in which he recognized and insisted on racial, linguistic, and religious equality for all

peoples in his kingdom; permitted all slaves and deported people throughout Babylon to be allowed to return to their home lands; and that all temples destroyed in their conquest be rebuild and refurnished!

Conclusion:

Daniel spent his whole life in a place he did not choose to be; doing a mission he did not choose to do; for a nation he did not choose to serve; enduring persecution and oppression he did not deserve – and as he writes the story of his life in that place, he wants us to know two things:

1. God caused him to prosper in all of his ways for all of his days (6:28).
2. God sustained his faithful obedience and satisfied his deepest longings (1:21).

And God will do the very same for us if we will dare to aspire to ask God to help us be like Daniel!