

Glorifying God in Hostile Territory

Freddy Fritz / General

Life in Babylon / Glorify; Hostility / Daniel 1:1-2:49

In Daniel 1:1-2:49, we learn that God calls believers to glorify him in hostile territory.

Introduction

For the next four Sundays, I would like to look briefly at the first six chapters of the book of Daniel in a series that I am calling, “Life in Babylon.”

The reason I would like to look at Daniel is that it answers the following question, “How do I live as a believer in the Biblical God in an unbelieving world?”

Older believers remember a time when the government, the media, the arts, the entertainment, the education, and so on were supportive of the Christian faith, or, at least, they were not opposed to Biblical Christianity. That is no longer the case. We live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith.

So, the question is appropriate: “How do I live as a believer in a pluralistic society where all the cultural institutions are hostile to my faith and to the God in whom I believe?”

Scripture

Today, we are going to cover the first two chapters of [Daniel](#). I am going to read selected portions from these two chapters for our lesson today.

Let us read [Daniel 1:1-8](#); [2:1-6](#); [17-19](#); [24-35](#); [44-46](#):

^{1:1} 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. ³ 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.

⁸ 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.

^{2:1} In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. ² Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³ And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." ⁴ Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." ⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. ⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."

¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

²⁴ Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not

destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation.”

²⁵ Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: “I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.” ²⁶ The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” ²⁷ Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: ²⁹ To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. ³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

³¹ “You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

Lesson

In [Daniel 1:1-2:49](#), we learn that God calls believers to glorify him in hostile territory.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God Gave Nebuchadnezzar Victory (1:1-2)
2. God Gave Favor to Daniel and His Friends (1:3-21)
3. God Gave Dreams to Nebuchadnezzar (2:1-16)
4. God Gave Daniel the Interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (2:17-49)

I. God Gave Nebuchadnezzar Victory (1:1-2)

First, God gave Nebuchadnezzar victory.

For decades, God sent prophets to warn his people that their idolatry, immorality, and injustice would lead to their ruin. The prophets foretold of a day when the Babylonian army would capture Jerusalem and take its people into captivity.

And so we read in [Daniel 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. 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.”

This took place in 605 BC. The capture of Jerusalem seemed like the downfall of God and his people. A pagan king and his gods had gained victory over Jehoiakim and his God. No matter how one looked at it, it seemed as if victory went to the idols and idolaters.

But, it was really a victory for the Lord. He had kept his word with his people. He said that he would send the Babylonians to defeat them—and that happened!

You see, our powerful God uses even unbelievers to accomplish his purposes.

When God's people do not submit to his rule, God overrules their plans to accomplish his plans for his glory.

II. God Gave Favor to Daniel and His Friends (1:3-21)

Second, God gave favor to Daniel and his friends.

We read in [Daniel 1:3-8](#), “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, 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. 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, 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. 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.”

Scholars suggest that Daniel and his friends were around fifteen years old at the time of their exile to Babylon. They were at an age where young scholarship blossoms. However, instead of going on to study in their familiar schools in Jerusalem, they were admitted to the most prestigious school in Babylon.

Now, this was very crafty on the part of Nebuchadnezzar. He did not take all the people of God into captivity. He took just the leaders, the cream of the crop.

Nebuchadnezzar knew that Judah was a fairly homogenous group of people worshipping one God. Babylon, however, was a pluralistic and diverse culture with many gods.

So, Nebuchadnezzar was attempting to destroy the worldview of the Jewish leaders and culture-shapers. He was going to “Babylonianize” them. He was going to make sure that the people of God became intellectually, socially, culturally, and spiritually Babylonians.

Now when the Jews got to Babylon, they did not move into the city. They settled down outside the city near Nippur on the Kebar Canal, some distance from the city.

Some false prophets rose up and said to the professing people of God, “Don’t move into the city. We are believers. That is a wicked, pagan city. They don’t believe in Jehovah. They have all kinds of false gods. They are going to press you into doing things that God doesn’t want you to do.” You can read about such a prophet named Hananiah in [Jeremiah 28](#).

But Jeremiah, the true prophet of God, was still back in Judah. He heard what Hananiah and others like him were saying to the people of God. So, he wrote a letter to the people of God. And it is this instruction that became the blueprint for Daniel’s life and service in Babylon. (By the way, Daniel spent his entire life in Babylon after his exile there.)

Jeremiah wrote the following words in [Jeremiah 29:4-9](#):

⁴ “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵ Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷ But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. ⁸ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹ for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.”

This must have astonished Daniel and the people of God now living in Babylon. God wanted his people to know that it was part of his plan to have his people live in an unbelieving world. They were to accept that fact and continue to live as faithful believers in that pluralistic culture.

Moreover, they were to understand that as believers they were not confronted with only two choices: separation or assimilation. The false prophets were saying that they were to be as separate as possible from the unbelieving

Babylonians. But God said that was not an option. On the other hand, they were not to assimilate in such a way that they became Babylonians in every way.

No. They were to keep their identity as believers in the Biblical God. They were to stand for truth. They were to obey all that God had commanded. But they were to do it in a way that was kind and loving.

In other words, they were to be salt and light in the place in which they found themselves. They were to speak the truth in love. They were to be in the world but not of the world.

We see Daniel doing this very thing when he resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. He gently asked that he be allowed not to defile himself by eating food that was contrary to the Mosaic Laws.

The official was afraid that he would be in trouble with the king if Daniel and his friends fared worse than the other students.

So Daniel suggested a test and if he passed the test, then he and his friends be allowed not to violate God's law.

The official agreed. Remarkably, "at the end of ten days it was seen that [Daniel and his friends] 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" ([Daniel 1:15-16](#)).

After three years, King Nebuchadnezzar himself gave Daniel and his friends their final exam. "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" ([Daniel 1:20](#)).

So, it is possible to excel in a pluralistic society without assimilating or separating from it.

III. God Gave Dreams to Nebuchadnezzar (2:1-16)

Third, God gave dreams to Nebuchadnezzar.

[Daniel 2:1](#) states, "In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him."

It does not seem that Nebuchadnezzar had lots of different dreams but rather he had the same dream on multiple occasions.

But Nebuchadnezzar realized that his counselors would likely interpret the dream favorably. So, he cleverly said that they would not only have to interpret the dream but that they would have to tell him what he had dreamed. This is what we read in [Daniel 2:2-6](#):

² Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³ And the king said to them, “I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.” ⁴ Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.” ⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. ⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.”

Nebuchadnezzar’s counselors pleaded with him to tell them the dream. But he would not do so.

Finally, in desperation, the counselors said to the king, “The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh” ([Daniel 2:11](#)).

Nebuchadnezzar became furious. He ordered that all the wise men in Babylon be destroyed.

Now, Daniel was one of Nebuchadnezzar’s wise men at this time. So, the king’s order meant that he and his friends were to be destroyed.

Daniel, of course, knew nothing about the king’s dream. When he learned what was going on and that all the wise men were to be destroyed, he asked—with prudence and discretion—that the king grant him an audience so that he could show the interpretation to the king.

Once again, we see how Daniel was living as salt and light in a pluralistic world.

IV. God Gave Daniel the Interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (2:17-49)

And fourth, God gave Daniel the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

First, I want you to notice that Daniel prayed to God. We read in [Daniel 2:17-19](#), "Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven."

Second, notice the interpretation that God gave to Daniel. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he dreamed of a great image, something like a Statue of Liberty. It was a statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. Then, a stone was cut but not by any human hand. It struck the feet of the statue and the entire statue collapsed and was crushed to pieces that the wind blew away. And the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Then Daniel interpreted the dream to Nebuchadnezzar and said that his kingdom was the head of gold. Successive kingdoms would rise up and be dominant over the earth. However, all these kingdoms would eventually decline and fail. Finally, the stone represented a kingdom that never fails will rise up, as [Daniel 2:44-45](#) says, "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Daniel was saying that the kingdom of God is the only true, everlasting kingdom.

We live in a growing, pluralistic culture. We see the rapid decline of morality. We see the massive onslaught of secularism. And we wonder where it is all headed.

Conclusion

God calls believers to glorify him by looking to the One whose kingdom shall never end.

When Daniel and his friends heard this message they found new hope and confidence despite all their problems.

This message is also meant to encourage you by reminding you that although at times your life may appear to be a confusing collage of unconnected events—it is in reality, a vital part of the unfolding of a Divine Plan.

But the good news is that the kingdom of God has already come! And when Jesus returns, what is now hidden will be made manifest to the entire world. And all the kingdoms of man will be shattered against this one magnificent kingdom of God.

We are told in God's word that this kingdom, of which we are now citizens, will ultimately triumph! Whatever other elements of this dream may fascinate you, do not allow anything to obscure this one central fact: And that is that God's kingdom will eventually triumph! Amen.