***STANDING STRONG IN A WICKED WORLD***

**A study of the Book of Daniel**

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The Book of Daniel is both a historical book, AND a prophetic book in the Hebrew scriptures (Nevi-im and Ketuvim) set right after Babylon’s first attack on Jerusalem in 605BC.

They had plundered the city taking many Israelites into exile. Among these prisoners were four teenage boys from the royal family line of David.

The main one is Daniel, the writer of this book, whose name means “God is my judge”, but was changed to “Belteshazzar” by the Babylonians.

His friends who were taken captive from Jerusalem with him were;

* “Hananiah” which means ‘*Yahweh is gracious’*,
* “Mishael” which means *‘Who is like God’*, (like Michael) and
* “Azariah” which means ‘*Yahweh has helped’*.

Each of these three names and their meanings hold significance throughout the story. Nebuchadnezzar changed their names to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

This book tells of their faithfulness to God in standing strong while living in the wicked world of the Babylonians, and maintaining hope and devotion to the Lord in the land of their conquerors.

The book is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic. Chapter 1 is in Hebrew, 2-7 are in Aramaic, 8-12 are in Hebrew.

Among the highlights of Daniel are;

* God’s miraculous protection in the fiery furnace.
* God’s miraculous protection in the lion’s den.
* The handwriting on the wall.
* The rise and fall of Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of Babylon.
* Daniel’s miraculous ability to interpret dreams, that gave him favor in every kingdom he served.
* Daniel’s prophecy concerning the coming kingdoms that extend into the Messianic age.

There is so much to learn from the Book of Daniel. It shows us how God empowers, provides for, and protects those who are faithful to Him, even in a culture that is averse to the Word of God, and wicked in all of its ways.

**THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

**Chapter 1**

**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. **2**And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.”

**First; How and why did this happen?**

During the time of Daniel, Israel had already been divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel), and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). God had given them specific instructions and warnings through a succession of prophets, promising them that if they were faithful, they and their kingdom would be blessed, but if they were unfaithful they would suffer famine, conflict and defeat. The Northern Kingdom under a series of evil Kings, had become so disobedient and practiced so much evil, that God allowed Assyria to defeat them in 722 BC.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah (where Jerusalem is located), was spared, mostly because of the faithfulness of a righteous king named Hezekiah. He remained faithful to God, so that when the Assyrians tried to attack in 701BC, Hezekiah prayed and an angel of the Lord rescued the city and killed 185,000 Assyrians.

Hezekiah made one mistake, however. He bragged about his kingdoms wealth and displayed it to foreign visitors from Babylon, in an act of pride.

### Hezekiah Shows Babylon His Treasures

**2nd Kings 20:12-18“**At that time Berodach-baladan a son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. **13**Hezekiah listened to *and* welcomed them and [foolishly] showed them all his treasure house—the silver and gold and spices and precious oil and his armory and everything that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house (palace) nor in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. **14**Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, “What did these men say [that would cause you to do this for them]? From where have they come to you?” Hezekiah said, “They have come from a far country, from Babylon.” **15**Isaiah said, “What have they seen in your house?” Hezekiah answered, “They have seen everything that is in my house (palace). There is nothing in my treasuries that I have not shown them.”

**16**Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord. **17**‘Behold, the time is coming when everything that is in your house, and that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,’ says the Lord. **18**‘And some of your sons (descendants) who will be born to you will be taken away [as captives]; and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”

Hezekiah’s pride and conceit put the kingdom and riches of Jerusalem in peril. Word got back to Babylon that Judah had in its possession a wealth of treasure, including the sacred vessels that were used for temple worship. The Babylonians never forgot.

About 100 years later a new king came into power in Judah. His name was Jehoiakim, and although his father *Josiah* was a righteous king, he was not, “he did evil in the sight of the Lord.”

During that time, the prophet Jeremiah preached in Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote down the message God gave him for Judah on a scroll. It was a warning that Babylon would come and invade them as punishment for their terrible ongoing sin unless they should repent.

**Jeremiah 36:1-3 “**In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, **2**“Take a scroll [of parchment] and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and Judah, and all the nations, from the day I [first] spoke to you in the days of [King] Josiah until this day. **3**It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster which I plan to bring on them, so that each one will turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their wickedness and their sin.”

*(the scroll was brought to King Jehoiakim and read by a servant named Jehudi)*

**Jer. 36:21-23“**So the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it to the king and all the princes who stood beside the king. **22**Now it was the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house, with *a fire* burning there in the brazier before him. **23**And after Jehudi had read three or four columns [of the scroll], *King Jehoiakim* would cut off *that portion* with a scribe’s knife and throw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until the [entire] scroll was consumed by the fire.”

As a result, the Lord allowed King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army to conquer Judah, and later destroy the temple, and take the people captive. Daniel and his friends were among the first wave of captives taken to Babylon.

**Daniel 1:3-5 “3**Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— **4**young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. **5**The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.”

This was a special elite training school. Nebuchadnezzar selected the brightest, most-talented, handsome and intelligent young men to be trained in the highest levels of Babylonian education, in order to conscript them into his service.

**1:6-10“**Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. **7**The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

**8**But Daniel resolved not to *defile himself with the royal food and wine*, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. **9**Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, **10**but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”

This is the first test that these four Hebrew young men were given by God. The royal school that they were forced into required them to not only learn the ways of the Babylonians, but eat their food. The diet was carefully selected by the King and to reject it was a punishable offense to not only them, but the chief official as well. It is very likely however, that these young men grew up eating Kosher in honor of the Hebrew scriptures given to them by God, and did not want to defile themselves with “unclean” food.

**1:11-14 “**Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, **12**“Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13**Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” **14**So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.”

Either Daniel was given extraordinary power of persuasion, or the official was extraordinarily benevolent, but either way, they did not eat the *“king’s delicacies”* only took vegetables and water.

**1:15:16“**At the end of the ten days they looked *healthier and better nourished* than any of the young men who ate the royal food. **16**So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.”

The first miracle. They put themselves on a vegetable and water diet, instead of whatever high-protein, specialty diet the others were on, and they looked “*healthier and better nourished than any of the young men.”*

They did this clearly to honor God, and not give in to the pagan influences of the culture. God rewarded them for that.

*[ Incidentally, some people do what’s called “The Daniel Fast” in order to lose weight. It probably works for that purpose, but that’s not what these young men intended it for. In fact Daniel 1:15 in the King James version says;*

***Dan. 1:15 (KJV)“****And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.”*

*SO, if you do the “Daniel Fast” properly, after ten days you will be “fairer and fatter in flesh” than all your friends. : )*

Something else extraordinary happened to them as well, that would remain with Daniel for their entire existence in Babylon.

**1:17“**To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.”

These four young men immediately became the most gifted and knowledgeable students in the entire Royal School. Daniel’s special ability to interpret dreams, even those that were not told to him, elevated him to a level of authority that no one other than the king was able to attain.

He interpreted two dreams for Nebuchadnezzar, and handwriting on the wall for King Belshazzar, and also had some very prophetic dreams of his own.

**1:18-21“**At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. **19**The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. **20**In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them *ten times better* than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. **21**And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.” <>

The kingdom of Babylon was filled with some of the most knowledgeable people and impressive magicians in the world. In fact Nebuchadnezzar collected the best of these people from all the surrounding kingdoms and brought them into captivity to serve him. Many of these people were the best of the best in their culture, and had advanced training in language, literature, science, and even magic arts, but they did not know and honor God.

This is typical of many ancient cultures than were very impressive in the areas of arts architecture, and science, but spiritually had nothing more than pagan faith in false gods.

It is also, not unlike today’s society.

There are things that world says, you “could do”, “should do” and even “MUST do”, and God is telling you “not to defile yourself with these things”.

We see very often, how worldly people of superior educational training, who may have advanced intelligence and abilities often find themselves void of wisdom, with no joy or hope and lead lives of dark emptiness because of the absence of God in their spirits.

And then we see young people who honor God in their lives, and adhere to His word, overflowing with wisdom, joy, and extraordinary natural and supernatural abilities *(much like Daniel and his friends),* because they honor God and put Him first, and become recipients of the wisdom, knowledge, joy, and power in the spirit that only comes from Him.

*How about you? Are you tempted to defile yourself by eating of the “King’s Delicacies” instead of honoring God with your lifestyle, behavior, and priorities?*

*What are some of those “delicacies” in your life?*

*Some may be obvious; others may be subtle.*

*Ask God to reveal them to you, and give you strength to resist them,.*

Our society, much like Babylon shows little to no regard for God’s will, and encourages people to think and behave contrary to His Word. This is why there is so much violence, depression, confusion, and despair in the world. Most people, even Christians are constantly tempted by the Devil and encouraged by the world to neglect God’s will and His word, and eat of the “King’s Table” (whatever that may mean to you).

God wants us to be ”*healthier and better nourished” and “In every matter of wisdom and understanding, them ten times better”* than those in the world who eat of the “King’s table”.

This is available to all of us when we determine in our heart to honor God in all things, submit to His word, and not the ways of the world, AND walk in the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

God’s Spirit leads us into deeper wisdom, hidden strength, and enduring joy, helping us Stand Strong, even in a Wicked World.

Paul wrote these words to the church in Corinth, who also found power through the Spirit to stand strong in the pagan world in which they lived;

**1st Cor. 2: 6-10** “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. **7**No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. **8**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9**However, as it is written:

“What no eye has seen,
    what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
    the things God has prepared for those who love him—

**10**these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.”

God has prepared *a life of great things* for each of us!

Let us not miss it, or forfeit it,

by giving in to the temptation to; ignore His word, neglect His will, and go along with the ways of the world, rather the wisdom of God.

**Let’s resist the “delicacies” of this world, and be faithful to God, so that His great purposes will be fulfilled in each of our lives in this generation. <>**