

THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

Synopsis & Context – Session #18 – Daniel in Exile

Judah's best and brightest were deported to Babylon when Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. Daniel and his trio of friends were among their ranks. King Nebuchadnezzar introduced them to their new homeland by enrolling the four young men into his court. Here they were lavished with food and wine from the king's table and invited to enjoy the cosmopolitan pleasures of the world's most sophisticated city. Daniel and his companions graciously resisted. They asked for vegetarian meals so they could stay faithful to Jewish dietary laws. The king's official worried that their meager diet might leave them pallid and weakened, but God blessed their choice with academic success and physical stamina. They flourished and the ruler of the world's greatest empire took notice.

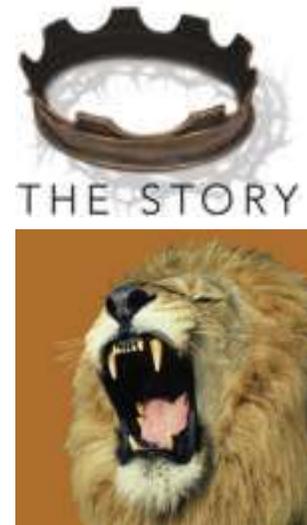
The king awoke one morning having been greatly troubled by a dream. He demanded an explanation of its meaning from his wise men and also expected them to tell the dream itself as a guarantee of accuracy...or else! The request was impossible, of course, except that God revealed both the events of the dream and their meaning to his servant, Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a four-layered statue. Its head of gold represented Babylon's might. The remaining layers of silver, bronze, and iron symbolized world empires that had not yet risen to power. Daniel's interpretation satisfied the king and saved his life and the lives of all the magicians and wise men in the kingdom. King Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to ruler over Babylon, made high-level officials of his three friends, and worshipped Daniel's God.

This devotion, however, was only temporary, as the king's advisors played to his pride. He built a gold statue in his own honor and all were commanded to bow down and worship at its feet. Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were faced with a grim choice: idolatry or death. They refused to bow. The king was enraged and ordered them to be thrown into a fiery furnace. They defied the king's last chance order and chose to remain faithful even in the face of death. The fire was stoked and the young men were bound and thrown into the inferno. An astonished king watched a fourth man join them as they walked unbound and unharmed through the fire. And once again the king praised their God.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by Belshazzar. King Belshazzar threw a grand party using the holy goblets they had stolen in the raid of Jerusalem's temple. The LORD sent him a mysteriously written message that appeared on the wall of the banquet hall. The king was terrified...for good reason. Daniel explained that the message said the king would soon meet his Maker. That same night the Persian army invaded Babylon. Belshazzar was killed and Persia became the silver layer in the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of years before.

The new king, Darius of Persia, gave Daniel a promotion. Daniel's rivals were jealous and plotted his death. They deceived Darius into signing an irrevocable decree forbidding prayer to anyone except the king. The penalty was a single night stay in a cave of hungry lions. Daniel responded by doing as he had always done; he knelt and prayed. Of course, the king's officials brought such seditious activity to the king's attention and Darius was forced to throw his trusted servant to the lions. So, the king spent a restless night and rose in the morning to find that Daniel was safe and sound in the lions den. And the great King of Persia worshipped Daniel's God.

While Daniel, his friends, and the other exiles were kept in Babylon during the seventy years of captivity. The prophet Jeremiah carried out his duties in the ravaged city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah sent a letter of hope to the captives reminding them that God would one day bring them back to Jerusalem and encouraging them to prosper even as exiles in a foreign land. Daniel had done just that. He watched the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms and remained faithful. In the great Upper Story of God, Babylon had been a detour rather than a destination.



Chapter #18: *Daniel in Exile* is ‘woven’ from selections from *Daniel and Jeremiah*.

Daniel 1—3, 6; Jeremiah 29—31

Plot Points for Chapter 18: Daniel in Exile

God is sovereign over the events of our lives and world empires. Daniel and his friends were called to a difficult task: to be a holy people in an unholy culture. As seen in the lives of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, pride is always punished. God never abandons his people, whether they are in a lion’s den, a fiery furnace, or exile.

Daniel and his fellow exiles faced a daunting challenge. How could they live as holy people in the midst of an unholy culture? The vision and values of Babylon were not those of the covenant community. They constantly interacted and worked with people who embraced false gods, lived sinful lives, and approached everyday existence with a radically different set of norms. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah provide a powerful example of how God’s people can live faithfully in the midst of a sinful, ungodly culture.

They resisted bitterness. Consider how difficult this would have been for them. They had been dragged away to a foreign land, possibly made eunuchs, and thrown into service for a king they despised and hated. Yet rather than growing bitter, they made themselves useful.

They always remained respectful. Rather than simply “taking a stand,” they approached their peers and superiors with humility. At the same time, they absolutely refused to compromise on the non-negotiables. If it meant fire or lions, they were willing to sacrifice.

Ultimately, they maintained hope in God’s Word. Daniel was aware of Jeremiah’s prophecy: in seventy years the exile would end. Daniel’s hope was not in his ability to change his circumstances. His hope was in the sovereign Lord and his promise. Armed with that hope, Daniel and his friends were able to live lives of significance, even in an unholy culture.

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

God’s Story – YOUR story!

- What surprises you the most in this story?
- What makes Daniel stand out among other prophets (messengers of God)?
- What helped maintain faith throughout this period?
- How do we see God’s faithfulness in this period?
- What makes Daniel an important character and this part of *The Story* remain “our story”?