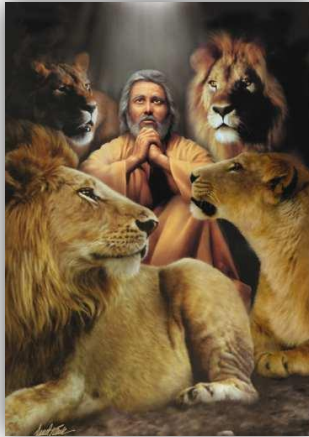


THRIVING IN BABYLON

PART 1: PREPARE FOR BATTLE

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567



When one thinks about Daniel from the Bible certain images come to mind. For many Daniel is the one who was thrown into the lion's den. When king Darius appointed Daniel as second in command over Babylon he found himself facing 120 very angry rulers who immediately plot to have him killed. These satraps convinced the king to sign an edict stating for the next 30 days everyone in Babylon was only allowed to pray to Darius and not to another other human being or god. Of course they knew Daniel prayed three times a day to God and was forbidden to pray to a person or to another god. When Darius was told Daniel still prayed to his God, the king was forced to throw Daniel into the lion's den. In the morning they pulled out Daniel from the den and he did not have a single scratch!

For many other people the mention of Daniel brings about images of detailed prophecies. Daniel had some really bizarre visions and dreams. The complexity and accuracy of

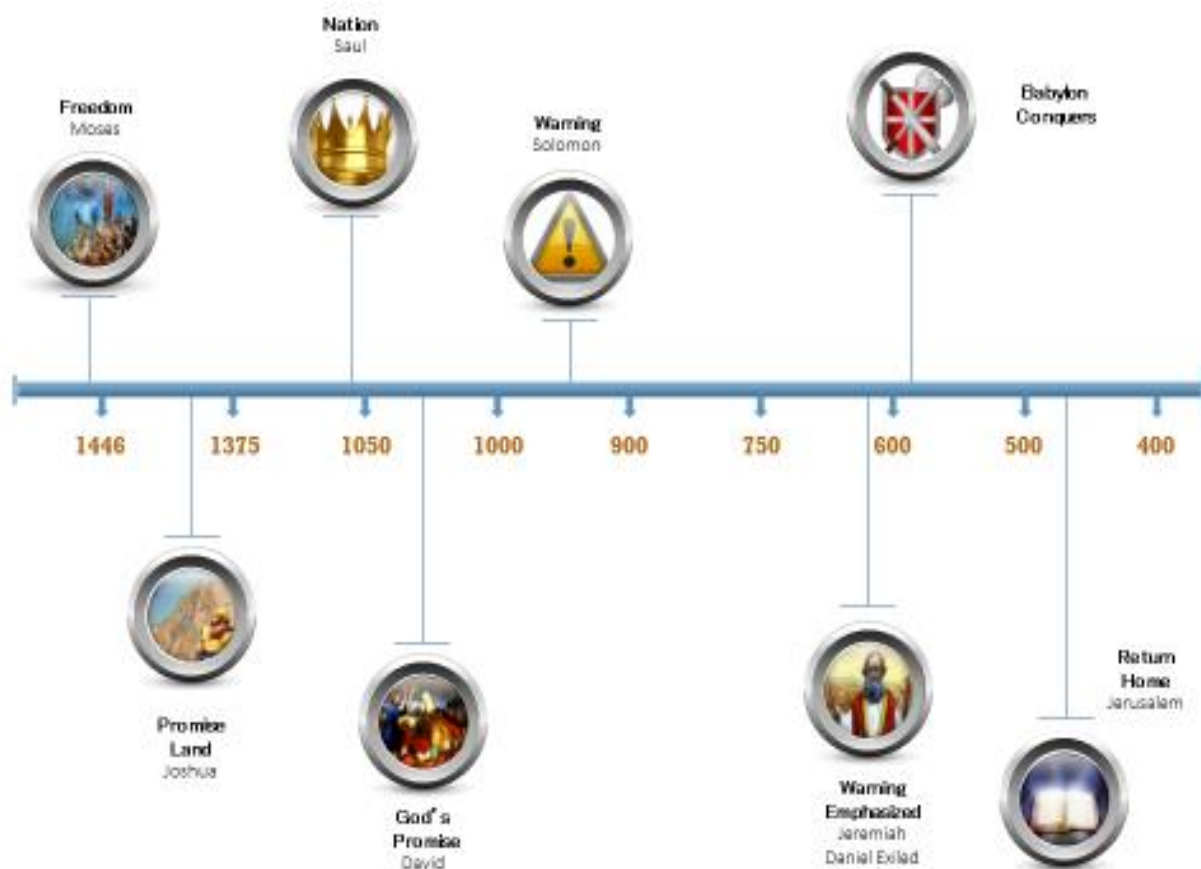


the book of Daniel is mind boggling. Most scholars who try to make sense of these prophecies and their timelines end up creating charts like the following that have countless points of fine print and cross references. Using the book of Daniel, these scholars have made some rather impressive predictions concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ but in the end they always turn out to be nothing more than mere speculation. While this does not mean we should not read Daniel's prophecies, it does mean we must be careful to not assign an exact date to written material where future dates are not given. Remember, our wisdom is foolishness in God's sight (1 Corinthians 3:19) because only the Father knows the day and the hour of Jesus' return (Mark 13:32).

In his book *“Thriving in Babylon: Why Hope, Humility, and Wisdom Matter in a godless Culture,”* Larry Osborne brilliantly makes the case that the main theme of Daniel being *“Thriving in Babylon.”* For Osborne, he sees the book of Daniel as being a template on how to live and thrive in one of the most godless of all cultures. Daniel's counterintuitive “responses to wicked leaders, evil coworkers, and a godless culture” (Kindle, loc. 147) of hope wisdom and humility are seldom practiced

by today's spiritual leaders and committed Christians. The first part of this sermon series will begin by giving some historical background information on Daniel's situation and how one is to prepare to enter into the battleground of living amongst foreign gods and practices. Part two of the series will focus on how to remain hopeful when opposition to living a holy life becomes intense. Part three of the series will focus on creating credibility amongst the unsaved and the last part will focus on being wise and on the power of perspective.

Daniel's Situation



Let's look at Israel's history so that we can get a better understanding of Daniel's situation.

1. To begin with the children of Israel are freed from their bondage in Egypt under Moses as their leader at approximately 1446 BC. After having been in bondage for over 400 hundred years, the power of God demonstrated in the Ten Plagues of Egypt forces Pharaoh to the let the Israelites go. The Egyptians looked favourable on Israel to such an extent that their gifts to them was the equivalent to plundering Egypt (Exodus 12:35-36).

2. After having wondered in the wilderness for their lack of belief that God would give them victory over the giants of the land (Numbers 13), Joshua leads the children of Israel and they conquer the promised land around 1400 BC. At this point they have no human king because God was to be their king (1 Samuel 8).
3. Israel cries out to Samuel and demands they have a king. Even though God stated He was disappointed in Israel for having rejected Him as their king, He grants them their wish. Saul, a man of good standing, handsome and a head taller than anyone else was anointed as king of Israel around 1050 BC.
4. David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), succeeds Saul as king around 1011 BC. During his reign God makes David a promise that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7). Under David's reign Israel flourishes.
5. In 971 BC David chooses his son Solomon to succeed him. Solomon asked and received wisdom from God (1 Kings 3). Solomon built God a temple (1 Kings 6). David warned Solomon that if he turned his back on God, God will turn his back on him (1 Chronicles 28:9). This is a stern warning not only to Solomon but to all of Israel.
6. Israel was sent many prophets to warn them that God was angry with their disobedience and was about to destroy them. Despite the reforms of King Josiah God's anger continued to burn against Judah (2 Kings 23). Jeremiah prophesied that Babylon was coming and the best Judah can do is to surrender and beg for mercy (Jeremiah 21).
7. Babylon attacks Judah in 605 and Daniel amongst others are exiled. Babylon assigned Zedekiah as a vassal king but after he made allies with Egypt to overthrow Babylon's influence, Judah is attacked and decimated in 586 and most of Judah is exiled.
8. In 538 BC Cyrus the Great of Persia defeats Babylon and exiles are allowed to go home. As predicted by Jeremiah (ch. 29) the exile lasted for approximately 70 years.

Daniel was born in 621 BC. He was only 16 years old when he was exiled. Just old enough to be able to look back at the above rich history of Israel to see God's right hand at work for over the last 1000 years. He would have remembered Josiah's reforms for he was age 11 when Josiah died. Daniel knew he was going to spend the majority of his life living in a foreign, pagan kingdom. Daniel only returned to Judah after the first year of Cyrus' reign (Daniel 1:21) at age 87. How was Daniel live a holy life in a godless culture and can his lessons of hope, humility and wisdom apply to our modern age? To answer that question let's first look at our own culture and then compare it to Daniel's to see if he went through more difficult times than us. If he did then his lessons are certainly applicable today.

Evils of our Culture

When our world feels like it is about to crumble one can't help but feel like we are living in the evillest of all times. A time when everyone openly and proudly looks and acts like the



devil himself! The nine out ten people that are not saved openly reject any god but themselves! Almost every generation looks back in time and wonders where the "good old days" went (Loc 236). Looking back to the past who could ever forget when television seemed to portray good Christian values. Anyone remember Leave it to Beaver in the 1950 and 60's, a show where dad always made time for his family, mom cooked and cleaned in a dress and pearls and "beaver" was always being taught good family values? Anyone remember Little House on the Prairie or the Waltons in the 1970s. Anyone remember Highway to Heaven, The Cosby Family or Full House in the 1980s?

While these television shows certainly portrayed families as having strong moral values in reality these times were not as pristine as we might like to admit. Was the Hippie Movement



in the 1970s, which focused on harmony with nature, communal living, artistic experimentation particularly in music, and the widespread use of recreational drugs; really grounded in God's holy word? "Promiscuous sex and hallucinatory drugs were celebrated as the path to enlightenment" (Loc 250). In the 1960s LSD was inexpensive and the favorite drug of the hippies. In the 1970s, the favourite drug was marijuana. In 1978, in a Gallup Poll, 66% of Americans said marijuana was a serious problem in the high schools or middle school in their area, and 35% said the same of hard drugs (Source: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/6331/decades-drug-use-data-from-60s-70s.aspx>). Who could ever forget the race riots of the 1960s and 70s in Newark, Detroit or Harlem; just to mention a few. To make matters worse the 70s

and 80s were a time period when no one over the age of 30 was to be trusted (Loc 253). Is this the time period in which we think living a holy life was easy?

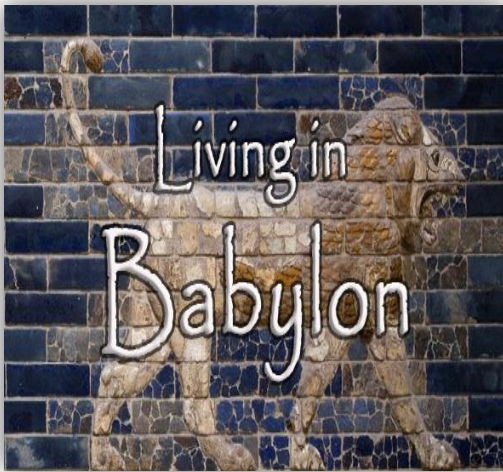


The point that I am trying to make is that the evils of the past tend to fade from our memory while the injustices of the present stand out breaking our souls with unbearable grief. To believe one is living in the evillest of all times is to deny the history in which many time periods such as Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, the persecution of Christians under Diocletian, Hitler or Rwanda's genocides; as being, dare we say, less heinous than living in our present age in a land of plenty and freedom. This does not mean it is not difficult to live in a modern day and age where absolute truth, belief in one god, diminished

church attendance and the outright distrust of any organized religious body is prevalent. What this brief historical lesson tells us modern day Christians is that there is hope because we have ample examples of Christians who have lived in far more evil of times than us and yet were able to live good and holy lives!

Evils of Babylon

Now that we understand that evil has always existed and has been more prevalent in the past, let's turn to Daniel's situation and compare it to that of our own. Sometimes the innocent



has to suffer with the guilty (Loc 184). At God's right hand of punishment Daniel had lost his entire culture and way of living even though he had not sinned. To make matters worse he and the other nobles were forced to serve one of the most wicked nations that have ever existed. Immediately before Jesus' return and angel of the Lord will come down from heaven and cry out "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great" (Loc 265). Since Babylon ceased to exist in accordance with prophecy (Isaiah 13;21, 47:7-9; Jeremiah 50-51), the best explanation for this statement is that Babylon has become a personification of evil that fully exemplifies Satan's kingdom. Even at the end of time Babylon will represent the worst of all in the epochs of time (Loc

265).

To make matters worse Daniel described the king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar as being hotheaded, murderous, vain, unreasonable and incredibly cruel (2:5-12; 3:1-6, 13-15; 4:27-32). Nebuchadnezzar placed the holy items of Israel in the temple of his demonic god, Murduk, as a

way of publically mocking the God of Israel (Daniel 1:2). Later he built a golden statue as a tribute to his power and fame and executed anyone who refused to bow to him (Loc 280). Daniel and his three friends were forced to learn the language of the Chaldeans in an attempt to certify them as enchanters and magicians, experts in the dark practices of the occult (Loc 287). Equally cruel and humiliating was when they changed Daniel's name which meant "God is my Judge" to Belteshazzar which meant "Bel's Prince." If that was not cruel enough, Larry Osborne makes a convincing argument that due to Daniel's family not being mentioned in Scripture and due to the king not wanting his close advisers capable of having children with his harem, Daniel was most likely castrated. Based on this evidence I think we can agree that Daniel lived in a kingdom far more evil than that of our own!

Holy Living in Evil Lands

Living in such an environment with rich memories of Israel's glorious past in his mind, one would not blame Daniel if he had become bitter and enraged with thoughts of revenge on



his enemies. Instead of being engulfed by rage, "God's control was the lens through which he viewed everything that happened to him and to his nation" (Loc 213). It was God's will that Judah would serve the evil king Nebuchadnezzar for 70 years and Daniel had all intent of embracing His will and make the most of living for God in a land where evil reigned. He could have challenged God's will by being bitter and looking for any opportunity to overthrow his enemy but instead Daniel chose to trust God's sovereign plan to use Babylon as a form of discipline to force His people to repent.

From Daniel we learn that real faith or trust in God can stand even in the most difficult of times. Often we do not know if our faith is genuine or counterfeit until it is tested in the pressure cooker of tribulations. If Daniel stood on circumcision, participation in Mosaic sacrifices or the tracing of his lineage back to Abraham as his right to receive all of God's promises; then he would have become bitter and lost his faith. Counterfeit faith is to believe God is sovereign only in the good times but not in the bad times. Osborne states such a faith is similar to having fool's gold. While shallow, pleasure seeking faith might fool yourself or others that your attitude towards God is holy, it will not fool God (Loc 504). Daniel's tribulations were not meant to break him but to display his righteousness to a nation that were unfamiliar with God's light. In a similar manner we should consider tribulations pure joy because when our faith stands the test of time then, like Daniel, we will become true lights unto this fallen world!

Preparing to Enter our own Babylon



To prepare to enter into our own Babylon, then, how does one make sure one's faith is genuine and strong? While the Israelite people often falsely stood on circumcision, observance of religious rituals and lineage to Abraham as being sufficient to claim holiness, today we often falsely stand on good intentions, high moral standards and the approval of other Christians as being the litmus test of genuine faith (Loc 597). It is easy to confuse good intentions with genuine faith. Like a modern day gym many are quick to sign up to serve in God's kingdom but only to later avoid any kind of genuine service. Being the seed that falls on rocky ground, many Christians tend to fall away and look for any means of escaping trials and tribulations (Matthew 13). Good intentions alone are not to be classified as the fruit of the Spirit (Matthew 12:33) but instead as proof that in the absence of biblical morality proves one does not know Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

To survive and strive in our own modern day Babylon we need more than good intentions or a fast start, we need a solid relationship with Jesus who produces the seeds of righteousness in our lives! To be toughened up we need to go through a spiritual boot camp that trains us obedience, perspective, endurance, confidence and courage (Loc. 727).

1. First, under the onslaught of spiritual attack it is imperative that we obey God when He tells us how to persevere. When the path of obedience does not make sense, or appears to be too costly we need to trust and submit (Proverbs 3:5-6) to the Lord who always does good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28).
2. Second, we have to keep perspective that the loss of privilege does not lead to believing one is going through harsh persecution nor does persecution lead to hatred (Loc 759). Like Apostle Paul we are to see tribulations as momentary troubles in light of the heavenly glories we are about to receive (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
3. Third, the ability to endure tribulations is intensified as one survives each difficult time. With the power of the Holy Spirit we can serve God in His kingdom with joy in our hearts.
4. Fourth, have confidence that God will help one to endure anything. "Anytime we overcome something we once feared or dreaded, we walk out with a new level of confidence and courage" (loc 795).
5. Lastly, we need to be courageous. When crushing defeats come let us define them as the fertile soil in which further reliance on God is planted. Even though the majority

of the biblical hero's failed spectacularly, their repentance and getting back up truly defined their courage and faith.

After having been trained in obedience, perspective, endurance, confidence and courage we can face the tribulations of living in our own Babylon.

Thriving in Babylon

For Larry Osborne, the book of Daniel is not just about the lion's den or prophecies but should be seen as being a template of how to live and thrive in one of the most godless of all



cultures. Daniel's counterintuitive responses to wicked leaders, evil coworkers, and a godless culture of hope wisdom and humility are seldom practiced by today's spiritual leaders and committed Christians. To prepare for our own Babylon's in life we need to go through a spiritual boot camp that trains us obedience, perspective, endurance, confidence and courage. In the next three sermons we are going to see how Daniel's reliance on hope, humility and wisdom allowed him to survive and thrive while living in one of the most unholy of all nations. The message of the book of Daniel is simple: if he can live a holy life in the

most wicked of all nations to ever exist then by applying the same Scriptural lessons he used to survive and thrive we can do that same! Part three of the series will focus on creating credibility amongst the unsaved and the last part will focus on being wise and the power of perspective.