

Sermon: Choices

Text: Daniel 1

Discussion Questions:

In order to fully appreciate and apply these twelve chapters of the Book of Daniel, it helps enormously to understand the flow of events that led to the situation that Daniel and his fellow prisoners of war (aka: “exiles”) find themselves in.

The people of God (Israelites) became a divided kingdom after the death of King Solomon in 931 BCE: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. While there were brief periods of faithfulness among the people and the kings of Judah and Israel, these centuries were predominantly a period of decline into various forms of idolatry and injustice. Despite God’s warnings over many generations through the prophets, the people of Judah and Israel continued to worship other gods, commit violence, and treat their neighbors unjustly.

In 722 BCE, the Assyrians (think Syria) conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, deporting its people to Assyria. The Assyrians imported people into various areas, with the aim of separating people from their culture of origin so that they would lose their identity as a people. The goal was to have them absorbed into Assyrian society. Tragically, this process worked and the 10 northern tribes of Israel lost their identities. They are called the “10 lost tribes”; they never came back to re-settle the land that they had lost.

By the 7th century, the Babylonians (think Iraq) had conquered the Assyrians—and a king by the name of Nebuchadnezzar gained control of the Babylonian empire. In 605 BCE, one of his first moves was to conquer Jerusalem, and take captive Judah’s King Jehoiakim—as well as many prominent citizens of Judah (the best and the brightest). Daniel and his friends were likely among this first group of Jews deported (Daniel 1:1). By 586 BC (over the course of the next 20 years), Nebuchadnezzar had systematically destroyed Jerusalem—deporting over 10,000 Jews, dismantling the Temple, and destroying the city.

The Book of Daniel is about living as the people of God in a foreign land—expectantly and faithfully—whether as people in Babylon or anywhere in “exile,” under a rule which is not the rule of God. Daniel—and several of his good friends—provide for us a great example of integrity and witness among a culture that does not honor God. They are a great example of some of God’s people who must navigate cross-cultural relationships, especially among powerful people.

- Discuss for a few minutes our present situation. How would you describe our current climate, here in America, with respect to living as a follower of Christ?
- Would you say that you have an awareness of what is going on around you and how the church must respond to it (similar to the folks in Scripture who lived in exile)? For them, they understood their alien nature—do we?
- What worries you more—the future or your present situation? Why?
- What about your present situation makes you worry about the future?

Examination:

- Read **Daniel 1:1-7**
 - We read in verse 1 that Jehoiakim (Ja-hoi-uh-kim) was the king of Judah. Of the twenty kings of Judah—beginning with Rehoboam in the year 930BC—how many kings of Judah were there? Where does Jehoiakim fall in the order?
 - According to verse 2, had God somehow lost control of the situation—allowing Iraq to invade and overtake Judah while He wasn't paying attention?
 - Is it difficult to imagine Iraq—or Iran—wanting to invade Jerusalem today? What do you make of the fact that in the past 2500 years, NOTHING HAS CHANGED?
 - These next few verses describe a practice that was common in those days. Instead of simply putting to death the brightest and the best of the conquered nation—something quite opposite took place. They were wined and dined. They were brought into the palace, and treated like royalty. Why do you think this happened?
 - Given the fact that Daniel was in this group—what does it tell you about him?
 - We see the word “trained” in verse 5. What are some other words that might be used instead?
 - What were the actual, Hebrew names of four of these young men that become the focus of this story? Why do you think they were given new names? How do you think these men would feel about the fact that today—after all of these years—we know three of these men by their Babylonian names, and not their Hebrew names?
 - Why do you think that we continue to use Daniel's Hebrew name—and not his Babylonian name?
 - Think about this situation in light of your own life. What is the most difficult situation you've ever had to face? How did you handle it? What did it reveal about your faith?
 - What tests or trials are you facing right now? Are you clinging to God and continuing to faithfully live as he commands? Or are you tempted to compromise your faith?

- Read **Daniel 1:8-21**
 - What would you say is the key word in verse 8?
 - How is verse 9 an example of the fact that God honors Godly decisions?
 - Talk about the brilliance of Daniel's plan in verses 11-14. What is the wisdom of Daniel's suggestion? What difference do you think it made that he wasn't doing this alone—but was joined by three of his good friends?
 - How do you think this decision—made when they were probably teenagers—changed these four men for the rest of their lives?
 - What did God do for them that went far beyond mere protection? (v. 17)
 - There's an old song that says: “Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone; Dare to have a purpose firm, dare to make it known.” What are some ways that you can live this out in your own life?

Application:

Compare and contrast yourself to Daniel. How are you preparing not only to survive living in an ungodly culture, but thrive as an influence? What about Daniel's approach to the problem can you learn from and apply in a specific situation this week?