

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Thriving in Babylon

When in Babylon

(Studies in the life and times of the prophet Daniel)

Study #1

Introduction: Loose associations...

Of things that “go together” I would list peaches/cream, sun/moon, male/female, thunder/lightning, mac/cheese, bacon/egg, and hamburger/fries.

Think of one thing and you end up thinking of the other.

If you mention the Old Testament prophet, Daniel, certain images will pop into my mind.

I was raised in a family that went to church every Sunday. And, while my church experience prompted me toward teen-aged atheism (feel free to ask me about it if you’re interested), I did hear Bible stories in the Sunday Schools of my youth.

So, when I hear “Daniel” I think about a giant golden statue set up on the plains of Shinar and a rescue out of a fiery furnace, a deliverance from a lion’s den, and some challenging prophecies about the future.

Today, you and I are beginning a new series of studies exploring the life and times of Daniel.

We’re going to hear all of the stories and we’ll ponder Daniel’s prophetic visions.¹

But here at the outset I’m going to suggest that while the prophetic sections of the book are very important and helpful and true, the purpose of Daniel’s book is not, fundamentally, to give us a detailed map of the future.

As well, while Daniel did experience some amazing rescues, I’m also going to suggest that the book of Daniel is not a book that assures us of God’s protection against danger and harm if we are faithful, or if we are faithful enough.

Of course God did protect Daniel and He protected Daniel’s friends, too. But the times when Daniel was protected are not so much *examples* of what God will always do when His people are faithful. More properly, they are *exceptions*.

Daniel is mentioned, but not by name, in the New Testament, in Hebrews 11. This chapter is what is sometimes called, “The New Testament Hall of Fame of Faith”.

The author tells us that among the heroes of faith are those who **[33] conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions.**

That last phrase is from Daniel life, when he was kept safe by God in a lion’s den (Daniel 6). So, yes, Daniel and others were protected by God’s power as they trusted Him.

Then, what follows in Hebrews 11 is another listing of people of faith who were *not* protected. These folks died horrible deaths. God chose to *not* rescue them from the trials of this life.

Today, you and I can read of both stories.

¹ I’ve provided what I hope will be helpful background material in the Appendix, at the end of the sermon manuscript.

I have read stories of God's stunning deliverance of His people from danger in places like Iraq and Syria. And I have read sobering, inspiring stories of faithfulness in which Jesus' followers have suffered terribly for their faith.

God did protect Daniel from harm on a number of occasions, but God did not protect even Daniel from harm on every occasion. And it is his - and his friends' - *faith, humility, and courage* during a long and very challenging life that inspires me and that I believe will equip us to live as he lived.

Daniel's book does not offer a guarantee of God's miraculous protection against all harm in this life. It does, however, point the way to kingdom-of-God sized impact whether you're living in Babylon or in San Antonio.

I'm about as eager to jump into the study of Daniel as I've been about a series of studies in some time. So, without any further delay, let's jump right into the book.

Daniel's book begins with a disaster.

Jerusalem, Fallen (Daniel 1:1-2)

[1] In the third year² of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar³ king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.⁴[2] The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to

² Some critics have accused Daniel of an error here in that he called the time of Nebuchadnezzar's siege against Jehoiakim an event of the third year, while Jeremiah, referring to the same event, reckons it as the fourth year. This is easily resolved. Daniel, fully assimilated into the Chaldean culture, was using the Babylonian calendar, which reckoned the first year of a king's reign as the year of his ascension, to be followed by the "first" year of his reign. Jeremiah, giving the Jewish spin, considers the first year the first year of his reign. Daniel reasonably would utilize Babylonian reckoning, having lived his whole adult life in Babylon.

³ Nebuchadnezzar = "Nabu (a chief Babylonian god) has protected my inheritance"

⁴ Parallel accounts are given in 2 Kings 24:1-2 and 2 Chron. 36:5-7.

the land of Shinar⁵, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

Those words describe an historical earthquake for the people of God. And so that we can all take in just how serious was the fall of Jerusalem, I'm going to take a couple of minutes to describe the events that led to this disaster.

The Kingdom and the Kings of Judah (?)

A united and then divided kingdom of God

At the beginning of its existence, Israel was one united nation stretching from the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the South, from the Mediterranean to the west and past the Jordan River to the east. This was Israel during the good reigns of King David and King Solomon.

However, during the latter years of Solomon's rule he stopped following the Lord and worshiped other gods. His apostasy led to the division of the united nation of Israel into a northern kingdom - referred to as *Israel* - and a southern kingdom - we call it *Judah*.

The fall of the northern kingdom of Israel

Tragically, Israel (the northern kingdom) was always led by kings who served other gods. And, because of her consistent rebellion against the one, true God, as discipline, He sent the nation of Assyria to attack and destroy her in 722 BC.

The history of the southern kingdom (Judah) reads only slightly better.

Judah continues, declines

⁵ Shinar is another name for Babylon, with the nuance of a place hostile to faith in the one true God. Shinar is associated with Nimrod (Genesis 11:2), an early rebel against God and His ways.

For quite some time, there were enough good kings (Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and others) to balance out the damage done by the bad kings (Rehoboam, Queen Athaliah, Ahaz, and others).

But there came a tipping point with the reign of King Manasseh. Manasseh's fifty plus years long reign plunged Judah deeper into rebellion than she had ever been.

And at the height of Manasseh's rule, God determined to punish the southern kingdom of Judah, as He had the northern kingdom of Israel. He would send judgment, and that judgment would come in the form of conquest by the Babylonian Empire.⁶

Culturally, politically, and militarily, Babylon was on the rise. And over the years of Judah's apostasy, she had become weaker and weaker, culturally, politically, and militarily. Judah was an easy target for Babylon.

The Kingdom and the King of Babylon

Babylon

Size and grandeur

The Empire spread over much of what we refer to today as the Middle East, taking in present-day Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and some of Iran.

The Empire's capitol city - Babylon - was enormous and filled with splendor. There were eight magnificent gates that led into the walled city.⁷

⁶ Judgment was forestalled for the thirty years of the reign of good King Josiah.

⁷ See the Ishtar Gate (Wikipedia article; or Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, article on Babylon), evidently built after the destruction of Jerusalem, but representative of the majesty of Babylon's gates. It was covered with blue enameled bricks, which served as background for alternating red-and-white dragons and bulls (symbolic of two Babylonian gods). The gate was approached by way of an impressive processional street, sixty-five feet wide and paved with white limestone and red rocks cemented together.

The walls were forty feet high, and were decorated with painted lions six feet in length with red or yellow manes on a blue ceramic background.

Within the city were the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar had built for one of his wives. These gardens are listed among the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Literature and education

As well, the Babylonians were very advanced in matters of astronomy, math,⁸ education, and literature.

They had developed an elaborate system of writing, called cuneiform (*nuneus* "wedge" and *forma* "form" from the Latin), which made words from wedge-shaped figures impressed into clay.

And Babylon was a very literary society.

Her creation story - a very involved, mythical tale of how the gods conspired to create the world - known as "The Enuma Elish," was masterfully written.

And her flood narrative, The Gilgamesh Epic,⁹ describes a worldwide flood that has many similarities to the Noah record in Genesis. You should know that the Noah record predates the Babylonian account by about a thousand years.

⁸ Art was highly developed in 6th century BC Babylon. And Babylon's scholars took mathematics to new heights. Archaeologists have found multiplication and division tables that students used to practice their math assignments. Algebraic achievement by the early Babylonians has led some to compare this period with the Renaissance. Her scholars also used a sexagesimal system of counting (in addition to the decimal system, based on multiples of 10), that has formed the basis for our 360-degree circle and 60-minute hour. They were masters of astronomy, in part due to an interest in astrology, but also for what appeared to be scientific purposes.

⁹ Many ancient peoples have a flood story that mirrors the Bible's more ancient narrative of Noah. Babylon's account tells the story of Utnapishtim who survived a worldwide flood in a large reed boat - built in the shape of a cube - accompanied by his family and pairs of all the animals.

Among writings discovered by archaeologists is wisdom literature, much like the book of Proverbs, and poetry, including *"The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer"* which is remarkably similar to Job.

Babylon had a very mature system of laws, recorded in the Law Code of Hammurabi.

In so many ways, Babylon was the epitome of advanced culture. We respect her many achievements. But there were undeniable downsides to Babylonian culture, too.

Babylon's dark side

"Babylon" is the term the Bible uses in various places to describe something that is altogether wicked. "Babylon" is the anti-God state.

She was arrogant and proud. Violence was the national past time. Babylon was supremely materialistic. The worship of her gods and goddesses was immoral and violent. Demonic, occult practices dominated society.

And, as we will see in the weeks to come, the king who reigned over Babylon was fit for just such an empire. Nebuchadnezzar was a godless, arrogant and prideful, violent, impetuous king.

So, this was the king (Nebuchadnezzar) and this was the nation (Babylon) that God allowed to destroy Judah, to depose the Jewish king, Jehoiakim, to lay waste the city of Jerusalem, to destroy and to loot the temple, to rob the city of its riches, and to take the riches of the temple into the house of a demon spirit.¹⁰

As we will read shortly, it was to Babylon that Daniel and his friends were taken. As far as we know, they had done nothing wrong, but they suffered for the sins of those who had come before them (the innocent are frequently collateral damage of the guilty).

¹⁰ God is behind history - note 1:1-2. Daniel saw God behind everything that happened in history and in his story.

If anyone ever had reason to lament the loss of the *"good old days"* it was Daniel.

"Oh, for the 'Good Ol' Days'"

Daniel's "good ol' days"

Daniel was raised in Jerusalem. He knew Jerusalem. It was all familiar. He knew Judah's land and climate and seasons. He knew her culture.

Jerusalem had all the things that make a culture a culture - food, language, art, clothing, daily routines, government, architecture. And that culture was the culture Daniel knew.

Babylon was flashier, wealthier, more intellectually stimulating, exotic and erotic and violent.

Everything was familiar in Jerusalem. Nothing was familiar in Babylon. Daniel "fit" in Jerusalem. He didn't in Babylon.

And then there was God. In Jerusalem, there was the temple where God was worshiped. There was the Levitical priesthood. There were the annual Jewish worship festivals.

Now, make no mistake. Judah was not spiritually healthy in Daniel's day. Jerusalem was not a revival center. But to be a God-fearing Jew was an acceptable thing in Jerusalem. If that was you, you fit right in. There was no overt antagonism to the ways of God in Jerusalem.

Then Daniel went to Babylon where none of that was true. Babylon was culture shock. Oh, for the good ol' days, indeed.

Have you ever had the thought, *"Oh, for the good ol' days"*? If so, you're not alone. Daniel might have had that thought. And if you've had that thought, I think that Daniel is just what you need.

Today's "good ol' days"

Same-old, same-old...

There are lots of parallels between our current cultural climate and the biblical culture. We are like Abraham in Canaan, Israel in Egypt, or the early church in the Roman world.

But I am suggesting that the closest biblical parallel to the rapidly changing faith challenges you and I face are the same ones that Daniel faced.

He was a young man who was taken from his birthplace to a land of captivity, taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, taken from a place where God and His ways were revered to a land and to a people who did not know the Lord at all.

And here we are, in 2016 America. In 2016 San Antonio. Now please don't hear me lamenting the loss of *"the good ol' days"* as if in former times everything was rosy and godly - because that's just not true. (Let's call that "Leave-It-To-Beaver-ism".)

From reading that I've done, I get the impression that most everybody, in most every era, has felt that their culture is heading downhill. Lots of people long for "the good ol' days." And I think that's because we tend to forget the evils of the past and to highlight the injustices of the present.

Speaking personally, the days of my own youth were good days for me, a white middle-class suburbanite. But it wouldn't have been so good if I had been a part of a black family living under the last vestiges of Jim Crow laws or if my family had been migrant farm workers.

I'm part of the baby-boom generation who are famous for nostalgia for "Yesterday" (Beatles) and "the days of our youth" (Led Zeppelin). We have conveniently forgotten what the days of our youth were really all about.

So...

Remember Vietnam and Watergate and the riots in Watts. Remember the assassinations (JFK, RFK, MLK), and remember

Woodstock as it really was (now romanticized as an idyllic "peace and love" concert for the ages, but which was, in reality a three days long sloop in the mud of a New York farm with mostly bad music and drug overdoses and rampant immorality).

Now, are we who believe in Jesus in America facing daunting challenges today? Yes. Most certainly. But that's nothing new. It was tough in the first century. It has been tough throughout history to live for Jesus. In many places today it's very tough to live for Jesus.

Which is not to say that nothing's changed. Something has changed.

Among the most dramatic changes that have occurred in our culture has been the general opinion about people of biblical faith.

It's not as bad as it could be and it may not be as bad as it will get. But it is different in that Christianity and Christians are now viewed as *irrelevant* and *extreme*.

(Good Faith) Christianity is irrelevant

I'm leaning heavily on the findings of David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons who have co-authored Barna Research Group's latest book, Good Faith (*Being a Christian when society thinks you're irrelevant and extreme*).

Good Faith confirms something that you may have noticed. That is, that there is a rising tide of apathy toward religious expression, generally, and toward Christianity, specifically.

For one thing, fewer and fewer people have a sense that our faith does anything positive for the common good. (For the record, this perception is false. It is always true that we could do more for the common good than we do. But by any standard, it is wrong to say that Christians don't make an enormous difference for good in the lives of countless people in our culture. Yet, more and more, we are perceived as being irrelevant when it comes to doing good.)

Other trending cultural perceptions about Christianity uncovered by Good Faith include the following:

- The Bible is not seen as a reliable guide for life.
- Christian leaders aren't viewed as credible life guides.
- Christianity is considered irrelevant to the real stuff of life and culture.
- People can live a good and fulfilling life without Christianity.

Kinnaman and Lyons have found that millions of Americans are what they refer to as "legacy Christians." These people have some background knowledge and experience of the faith, but the faith is now background noise that can be safely ignored.¹¹

For an increasingly large number of people in America today, Christianity is a way of life "that matters to somebody else." Not them. It is irrelevant.

We are also viewed as extreme.

(Good Faith) Christianity is extreme

Lots of things in our culture are popular *because* they are extreme. Think extreme makeovers, extreme weight loss, X (for extreme) Games, even extreme food (fried grasshoppers, anyone?).

However, because of events like 9/11's attack on the World Trade Center and Islamic jihadism, generally, many, many people are convinced that all forms of religious expression are *extreme* and *bad*.

Among a growing number of people in our society, that view extends to a Christian's commitment to obey the Bible's commands.

Many believe that evangelism and an agreement with the Bible's moral code (regarding sexual ethics in particular, especially concerning same-sex sexual relationships) and donating money to

¹¹ According to their research, 3 out of 4 US adults have some Christian background. 3 out of 5 of these are mostly inactive in their faith.

religious groups are all extreme. Some view reading the Bible silently in public and attending church as extreme.¹²

It has never been easy or terribly popular to live the life of faith. But, in America, it's now different than it used to be.

One major reason for wanting to look at Daniel with you over these weeks is so that we can see how he navigated life in an unfriendly-to-faith-in-God culture. We will learn a lot from Daniel as we seek to be salty and bright for Jesus in 2016.

A second reason for looking at Daniel is to explore the vitality of his faith when he could have listed reasons for not living faithfully.

The first two verses of the book tell us that Jerusalem was sacked and looted. And Daniel doesn't shy away from saying that God was responsible for it all. God superintended His people's judgment and all of the hardship that followed.

We next read that King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief servant to bring choice young men to Babylon to serve in his court.

Daniel and Friends, in Babylon (Daniel 1:3-7)

Training (Daniel 1:3-4)

[3] Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles¹³, [4] youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

¹² Pp. 50-51 of Good Faith identifies "nones" (people with no religious affiliation, atheists, agnostics) as the largest block of the US population. 45% of "nones" agree that Christianity is extreme.

¹³ We don't know from Scripture, nor does secular history tell us, how many were taken.

These exiles were forced to travel the five hundred miles from Jerusalem to Babylon. They were the cream of the Jewish crop. They were royalty, and they would be assets to the Babylonian king's administration.

They were chosen for their physical, personal, and intellectual capacities. Among these young people were Daniel and his three friends.

Over the course of a three years long training regimen they would learn the language and the literature of the Chaldeans.

They would study architecture, agriculture, law, and math.

And, they would have learned all about astronomy and its dark cousin, astrology. By their graduation, they would have been certified experts in the occult and demonic practices of the Babylonians.

Their education would have exposed them to things that were directly contrary to their faith. They would have learned things that violated their biblically-informed consciences and their moral scruples.

Then, as servants in the king's court, there is almost no question that Daniel and his friends would have been made eunuchs.

Granted, the Bible doesn't say this, but there is no mention of Daniel's legacy in children (which we might have expected to read about) AND it was common practice to make eunuchs out of those from foreign lands who served in the king's court AND the man in charge of Daniel's training was the chief of the eunuchs.

Somehow, my Sunday School teachers neglected to tell me that Daniel suffered castration.

Despite all of this deep cultural immersion in Babylon and his removal from everything familiar and his suffering - all with the active permission of God - Daniel retained his spiritual vitality for the decades of his life in Babylon.

Given the hardships we have suffered or those we may someday suffer, it will be really helpful to see Daniel remain faithful. We can learn from him.

And finally, in addition to educating these Jews, there was a transparent effort at some un-learning.

Brain-Washing (Daniel 1:5-7)

When in Babylon... (v. 5)

[5] The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service.

I'll not say much about the food fight right now because this will be our focus next Sunday. But Daniel and his friends were provided food they didn't know, likely food they didn't like, and definitely food they didn't want.

It was, from a Babylonian perspective, great food. It was rich food and good wine, lavishly provided. But it wasn't Jewish home-cooking. It wasn't comfort food for Daniel and his friends.

Much more to the point, it wasn't kosher food. And that was a problem. And we'll see next week how Daniel and his friends dealt with the food problem.

Beyond the food fight, they were also renamed.

My name is... (vv. 6-7)

[6] Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. [7] Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abed-nego.

Daniel and his friends were descended from noble families, since only the nobility were taken into the early exile. And, judging from their behavior throughout the book, we can guess that they came from God-fearing families as well.¹⁴

Their Babylonian hosts changed their names. Why would they do that?

Changing their names is an attempt to obliterate any remaining vestige of Judaism and any connection to Judah. They are seeking to erase their Jewish identity. Babylon is seeking to un-Jew Daniel and his friends.

- Daniel, whose Hebrew name means *“God is my Judge”* is now *“Belteshazzar.”* (*“Bel’s prince”*)
- Hananiah’s name (*“Yahweh has been gracious”*) is changed to *“Shadrach”*. (meaning unknown)
- Mishael’s name (*“Who is what God is?”*) is now *“Meschach.”* (meaning unknown)
- Azariah (*“Yahweh has helped”*) becomes *“Abed-nego,”* *“The servant of Nego”* (a Babylonian god).

Babylon did everything it could to force them to adopt new identities, new gods, and a new way of looking at the world.

But as we’ll see, nothing Babylon threw at them derailed them from their trust in the Lord. They remained faithful despite great suffering and despite having lost the external trappings of home. Babylon could touch their bodies; not their souls. Yep. We can definitely learn a lot from these guys.

Conclusion:

As I mentioned earlier, if we’ve had much exposure to Daniel, our minds make some natural associations when we hear his name. We

¹⁴ The names of these four young men indicate that they came from godly stock, the endings of their names *“el”* (the name for God) and *“iah”* (*“Ya”* being shorthand for *“Yahweh”*) being dead giveaways.

see a lion’s den, a huge golden statue of a king on a desert plain, and a blazing furnace. Daniel’s stories are embedded in our sub-conscious.

But, there is more to the book of Daniel, and much more to the man, than entertaining Sunday School stories.

Daniel served at the highest levels of the ruling world governments of his day. Through administration after administration, each king who knew Daniel came to the conclusion that he somehow needed this man if his reign was to prosper.

So, while others came and went, Daniel stayed in the halls of power for six decades.

The administrations in which Daniel served were not kind, benevolent, nonprofit institutions. Nebuchadnezzar did not put the growth and development of people before task.

No, Daniel spent a lifetime in a working environment where brutality and callous indifference to the welfare of people was the order of the day.¹⁵

Slavery was condoned. Human life was forfeited at the whim of the king. Power enforced at the end of a spear was everything.

The people among whom Daniel lived and worked operated on principles that were abhorrent to the God he followed. Wealth was accumulated through graft. *“Games”* were played where the currency was human life and the payoff was greater power.

So, if I was...

- ...living in a culture that was moving away from biblical foundations and I wanted to shine the light of Jesus;
- ...working in a society where people viewed my faith as extreme and irrelevant and I wanted to make a loving impact;

¹⁵ Daniel was certainly God’s prophet, but he was, professionally, a governmental servant and a faithful historian of God’s dealings with him. He lived during the exile, but not, as was the case with Ezekiel and Jeremiah, in the midst of his own people. He lived in the court of the ruler of the world and in the service of the state.

- ...daily rubbing shoulders with people who didn't know the God I know and I wanted to share the Good News winsomely and wisely;
- ...wanting to shine brightly for Jesus over the long haul in a lost world that God desperately loves...

...then I would want to get to know Daniel's story!

Keys to living faithfully before God in 2016 - in some ways, a world not too far removed from the kind of world in which Daniel lived - will be much more accessible if we look deeply at this man.

We will see a man whose faith was impactful in the most challenging situations. And we'll be equipped to be "on mission" for Jesus' Great Commission today.

APPENDIX

1. Background to the book of Daniel

Authorship and date of the book

Throughout Jewish and Christian history, the vast majority of Bible students have understood that this book was written by the man, Daniel¹⁶, who lived from around 620 BC until about 515 BC (remember, you have to count backwards in BC time).¹⁷

The book covers Daniel's activities under the successive rulers of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires - namely Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius the Mede (also Cyrus of Persia).

Daniel lived and prophesied during the time period known as the Babylonian Exile and ministered at the same time as a couple of other well-known prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

In fact, we know that at least Ezekiel knew Daniel, for he mentions Daniel in his own prophecy as a model of wisdom and righteousness!¹⁸

Where Daniel fits; what kind of a book is it?

In some ways, Daniel is a funny book. It is listed in our English Bibles in the section where we find the prophets. We might even classify Daniel

¹⁶ No question as to the authorship of Daniel was raised until the seventeenth century (except for one Porphyry, who lived in the third century AD).

¹⁷ The great majority of modern liberal critics of the Bible regard the book of Daniel as entirely spurious and composed centuries after the death of the sixth-century prophet. They suppose it to be a work of historical fiction composed about 165 BC and intended to encourage the resistance movement of the Maccabees against the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes. However, the German scholar C.F. Keil spends nearly 40 pages in his commentary ably defending the early date (sixth century BC) of the book of Daniel. Gleason Archer does the same in [A Survey of old Testament Introduction](#).

¹⁸ [Ezekiel 14:14] "...even though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their own righteousness they could only deliver themselves," declares the Lord GOD." (See also Ez. 28:3)

as a transition between the major (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and the minor prophets (the twelve after Daniel).

But, in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is found among what are called "the writings" (along with Psalms, Proverbs, Songs of Solomon, Job, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles), NOT the prophets.

In some ways, too, Daniel was a funny prophet. He didn't prophesy the way many others of the prophets did. God never delivered a message publicly through Daniel. Daniel never cried out, "**Thus saith the Lord....**" as did Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others.

Jesus did call him a prophet (Matthew 24:15) but his prophecies came through visions of the future and the interpretations of dreams.

Because of the wild character of some of the dreams and visions he was called upon to interpret, the book of Daniel is classified as apocalyptic.¹⁹

Purpose of the book

So, why Daniel? Why was it written, and why are we studying it, some 2600 years after it was written?

First, there is no other book in Scripture that gives as detailed and expansive an overview of world history as Daniel. The various prophecies he gives outline the period known as the "**times of the Gentiles**" (the period lasting from the beginning of the exile until the return of Christ at the end of the church age).

Daniel also informs the reader that the Jews have a future, and shows that when Messiah comes (when Christ comes back to reign as king), Israel will again play a prominent role in the affairs of world politics.

Certainly, Daniel's book shows God's sovereign authority over the nations of the world. They will serve His purposes, not He theirs.

¹⁹ The book of Revelation in the New Testament is another example of apocalyptic.

Second, Daniel's book serves to convince us of God's protection and preservation of His people, even while they were undergoing discipline for their disobedience. Like the later work, the book of Esther, God continues to work in the midst of Israel's national life, even in the time of their chastening.

Third, the book was written to serve Daniel's generation with an example of godliness and faithfulness. Daniel was an exile, writing to fellow exiles. He was God's man living in a heathen society, writing to God's people living in a heathen society. As such, Daniel has much to say to us, today.

2. Exile - An Integral Part of Ancient Near Eastern Politics

Other nations had practiced exiling defeated nation states for centuries

In the days shortly after Moses, Shalmaneser I of Assyria deported 14,400 young people from the middle Euphrates region. Ramesses II of Egypt was well known for exiling people to keep them under his control. Shalmaneser (V) of Assyria exiled many of the Israelites when he defeated the northern Kingdom in 722 BC.

The threat of being exiled far from home was always a reality that hung over the heads of smaller nations like Israel. And, further, God had specifically warned Israel/Judah of exile due to their sinful ways through the centuries.

Israel warned of a coming exile by God

Even as recently as the days of king Hezekiah, Isaiah the prophet had predicted exile for the Jews at the hands of the Babylonians.²⁰

Later, speaking as God's mouthpiece, the prophet Jeremiah pointedly spoke to the Jews in Jerusalem about a soon-to-come exile.

[Jeremiah 25:8] Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, "Because you have not obeyed My words, [9] behold, I will send and take all the families of the north," declares the Lord, "and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. [10] Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. [11] This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.²¹

3. Israel - Defeated and Plundered by Babylon (Daniel 1:1-2)

The prophetic word spoken by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25) finally came to pass in 605 BC, as we read in Daniel 1:1-2.

There is irony in this exile. Because of her sin, Israel was being carried away to Babylon, a nation at least as sinful as Israel. But God was using His prerogative as the Sovereign over the nations to bring discipline to His children, and Babylon was His chosen instrument.

(In the not too far distant future, Babylon would be disciplined, too, for her sin, by God's next instrument, the Medes and the Persians.)

As these verses make clear, when Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon from this invasion of Judah, he brought plunder to demonstrate Judah's submission to his own people.

²¹ In a number of the texts dealing with exile, one of the reasons listed for the punishment was the nation's failure to observe Sabbath rests for the land. Judah's sins against the Sabbath law lasted some 490 years, requiring repayment of 70 years of exile, so that *"the land could enjoy her Sabbaths."* (Chron. 36). The seventy years of the captivity were, in effect, God claiming the Sabbath, which Israel had violated, in order to give the land rest.

²⁰ Note, too, Amos 1:15; 7:11; Micah 1:16.

4. History of the Jews

(This short history is intended to give something of a sense of the flow of God's work among the Jews from their founding as the people of God under Abraham until the time of the Babylonian Exile.)

Founded with Abraham

Around 2,000 BC, God called the patriarch, Abraham, from the city of Ur of the Chaldeans (ironically, this was the same region to which Daniel was sent for exile, fifteen hundred years later!).

He told Abraham to go to the land of Canaan, where he was given great promises that a land, a great multitude of descendants, and a great nation would come forth from him.

Isaac

Late in life, he and his wife, Sarah became the proud parents of Isaac, the promised seed. To Isaac was born Jacob - and to Jacob was born the twelve sons who became the heads of the tribes of Israel.

Joseph

One of those sons was Joseph. Joseph was hated by his brothers for being his father's favorite. So, the brothers sold Joseph to some traveling nomads who in turn sold him to the Egyptians where Joseph rose in power, becoming second in command to Pharaoh.

After years of supposing that Joseph was dead, a famine spread throughout the whole earth, requiring Jacob's sons to travel to Egypt to buy grain.

They found Joseph there, and after they repented of their previous sins against him, Pharaoh brought the whole crew down to Egypt and cared for them until the famine was over.

Egypt

However, the Israelites ended up staying nearly 400 years, their status evolving from that of honored guests to slaves as the years dragged on.

It was near the end of their time in Egypt that God raised a great deliverer, Moses, who, after some persuasion, went to Pharaoh with, ***"Thus saith the Lord, 'Let My people go!'"***

Ten plagues later, Pharaoh said, *"Good riddance"* and let the Israelites flee.

Exodus

But, as they were leaving, Pharaoh had a change of heart and pursued them as far as the shore of the Red Sea. It was at this moment that Israel experienced the defining moment of her history.

God opened up the Red Sea so that His people walked through on dry land, the water stacking up like walls on either side of them. (When they walked through, it was as if they were traveling a birth canal. And, in fact, the Old Testament refers frequently to the Exodus event as the birthing of the nation.)

All Israel made it through safely. But, when the Egyptians tried to follow, the Sea closed in on them, with the Jews safe and sound on the other side.

Wilderness wandering

God's plan was for the nation to enter the land of Canaan again, quickly. But, when the people faithlessly refused to enter, He consigned them to a generation of wandering around in the desert wilderness, until that faithless generation had all died and passed off the scene.

God took care of the nation during that forty years of wilderness wanderings with manna and water.

Conquest under Joshua and Judges

Then, at the end of their wanderings, under the command of General Joshua, the people crossed the Jordan River into Canaan.

They crossed at flood stage in the springtime, and were only able to cross because the Lord stopped the flow of the waters when the feet of the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant got entered the Jordan.)

The next three or four hundred years were times of conquest and consolidation. The sons of Israel defeated the nations of the land and were ruled by Judges - Barak, Deborah, Samson, Gideon, and Samuel.

King Saul

But, during the days of Samuel, the people cried out for a King, because as they said, ***“We want to be like the other peoples of the land.”***

God acquiesced by giving them a king who was just like the kings who ruled the other nations, a man named Saul. And after Saul proved his lack of fitness to rule God’s people, he was replaced by a man who truly loved the Lord, David.

King David

While David ruled, Israel amassed military victory after victory. The kingdom was expanded under his leadership. True worship was established. And, while he wasn’t perfect (remember the Bathsheba and Uriah incident), the hearts of the people were turned to the Lord while he was King.

King Solomon

David’s son, Solomon, was the next King of Israel. And Solomon started well. He really did. But, the tragic lesson of Solomon is that starting well doesn’t mean much if one doesn’t finish well.

Mid-life, Solomon turned his back on God, and became polygamous and idolatrous.

Division of the kingdom and destruction

He led Israel into all manner of evil and apostasy with the result that following his death the unified nation of Israel - the Kingdom of God! - divided, north and south into **Israel** (made up of the ten tribes in the north) and **Judah** (the tribes of Benjamin and Judah).

Jeroboam was the first King of the north (Israel), and Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was the first King of the south (Judah).

The northern tribes continued in unrelenting apostasy through nine dynasties. There was not one northern King who feared the true God. They were all idolatrous to the core.

And after two centuries of this rebellion, God gave Israel over to the warlike nation of Assyria in 722 BC. Judah followed in rebellion and was destroyed by Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, in 586 BC.