

People in the church

The sermon

Intro

This morning we begin the book of Daniel. We'll see how God deals with sin. How God deals with his people. And how God rules his world.

BIG IDEA: God gives.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Point 1: God gives Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar (1:1-2)

READ 1:1-2

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah,

605 BC.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

There were three waves of invasion (605 BC, 597 BC, 586 BC). This was the first wave.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God.

Who gave Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar? God.

God gave Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar to be his possession. God gave Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar for judgment. God gave Nebuchadnezzar victory. Nebuchadnezzar was God's chosen instrument of judgment.

We shouldn't think that Nebuchadnezzar actually knew what was going on here. As if God spoke to Nebuchadnezzar and told him, "Here I'm giving you the items from my temple for you worship your god Marduk with." This is an editorial note by Daniel's biographer revealing God's behind the scenes involvement. Jehoiakim's defeat was an act of God.

Deuteronomy 28 warned that failure to obey the Law of Moses would result in curses like military defeat and being scattered among the nations as exiles. Jehoiakim's defeat was God keeping his word! What appears to be the defeat of God by rival deities is in fact God's judgment on his sinful nation. What appears to be the defeat of God by rival deities is in fact prophecy fulfilled.

Setting the stage

Daniel is the story of God's sovereign rule over his creation. **Sovereign** means God's in charge of all that happens in his world. The story of God's active involvement in the affairs of men. The story of God giving aid to his suffering people in exile. God isn't done with his people Judah even though it looks like it.

Point 2: God gives Daniel favor and compassion (1:3-16)

READ 1:3-7

Explanation

With Jehoiakim came youths from the royal family and the nobility.

The chief eunuch, Ashpenaz, is charged with selecting the best of the royal and noble youths for three years of education and future service.

The criteria was without blemish (handsome and without physical defects?) and ability to learn and use that learning well.

Youths likely indicates early teens. Youth could mean very young children, teenagers, and young adults. Joseph was a youth at age 17 (Gen 37:2, 30).

Learning (literature) would include history, math, science, economics, legal texts, religion, and practices forbidden by the Law of Moses like divination (interpreting signs/omens, dreams) and magic (casting spells). Think horoscopes and tarot cards.

Horoscope = a forecast of your future based on the position of the stars and planets when you were born; typically they contain advice and describe what's going in your heart right now = suggestive manipulation.

Tarot cards = cards with pictures used to predict the future = suggestive manipulation.

Note they learned how to practice what God forbids. Like a Christian teenager taking classes on tarot card reading.

They were also renamed. Names that celebrated Yahweh

- 1) Daniel ("God is my judge")
- 2) Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious")
- 3) Mishael ("Who is what God is?")
- 4) Azariah ("Yahweh is a helper")

became prayers to false gods and celebrations of false gods.

Reflections

- 1) Daniel and his friends had no choice in the matter.

God placed them there.

- 2) Daniel and his friends are suffering because of the sins of others.

Past kings and generations sinned. The faithful minority suffered captivity and exile alongside the unfaithful majority. For no fault of their own. Just like Job.

- 3) The royals and nobility had suffered loss.

Loss of freedom, home, possessions. Separation from loved ones.

- 4) They were indoctrinated to become Babylonians.

The end goal was faithful Babylonians for the king's service. Conquered peoples became valuable assets in expanding and maintaining the empire.

- 5) They were treated very well.

They weren't treated like garbage. Not like Israel in Egypt. They were given the best Babylon had to offer in terms of food and education. Babylon wanted to win them over. Treated like valuable assets.

READ 1:8-16

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank.

Why did he stand over food and wine? Isn't it odd that Daniel was okay with divination training but not okay with eating food? Why was this the stand Daniel chose?

Some suggest that the food and wine were offered to idols. This doesn't make sense since Daniel was okay with the vegetables.

A better option is Daniel didn't want to violate the dietary rules in the Law of Moses. Vegetables were okay, but certain meats were not. Meats like sheep, goat, deer were permitted while meats like camel and pig were forbidden (Deut 14:3-8). The same goes with sea creatures and birds. (Deut 14:9-20). There were also rules about not eating the blood (Deut 12:23-25) and things that died naturally (Deut 14:21). The best explanation is the king's food included forbidden foods or methods.

But what about the wine? Wine wasn't forbidden by the Law of Moses (Ps 104:14-15; Prov 3:9-10). Perhaps the wine process involved ritual contamination? Perhaps the wine was offered to idols but the vegetables were not?

Resolved

Daniel purposed in his heart that he was not going to consume this food and wine. He'd become morally and ceremonially unclean. Resolved is a completed action. Daniel's decision was settled. This isn't going to happen. Allegiance to God was the deciding factor.

Sometimes we need to come to a settled conclusion that an action is sinful and not an option. I'm not going to lie even though my boss wants me to. So he asked Ashpenaz for permission not to eat the food and drink the wine.

Then God acted for Daniel in the moment.

And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, – 1:9

Daniel made a dangerous request. If Ashpenaz granted it, he'd have his head cut off ("*endanger my head*") because of harm to the king's property. Ashpenaz wants to help, but he's afraid of the king's punishment so he denies the request.

God exerted influence on Ashpenaz's heart so that he was kind and merciful towards Daniel (didn't report him or have him killed). God influenced his decision-making.

Favor = the word for steadfast love. A kind disposition towards Daniel.

Compassion = merciful disposition that leads to action for one in a distressing situation.

Then Daniel approaches the steward. Lower level management. Daniel proposes a vegetable and water diet for 10 days. It's granted. After the 10 days, Daniel and his friends were fatter. A good thing. So the steward allows the diet. No damage to the king's property.

Application: respect

Daniel worked within the Babylon system rather defying it. Brash defiance would result in death. Daniel worked within the Babylon system rather than sneakily defying the rules. He started with a respectful request.

When under ungodly authority, engage moral issues respectfully and openly. Then leave the results to God.

As a Navy Civilian I once found myself forced on a trip to Newport News, Virginia for 16 weeks. I had to work 10 hour shifts seven days a week. That meant no Sunday morning service. My Dad told me about a rule allowing time for religious services. I approached my boss. He let me work 12-4 every Sunday instead of 6-4.

Application: choosing your battles

Daniel was okay with religious and divination training. But he wasn't okay with food and wine. He knew where to draw the line. God's aid throughout indicates he endorsed Daniel's choices.

In a world ruined by sin and Satanic deceit, in a world where sin is normalized and godliness is odd, we will find ourselves in situations that disturb our conscience. **We need to learn what to live with and what to refuse.**

From Daniel's actions I gather **it's okay to be indoctrinated in what is forbidden, but it's not okay to practice what is forbidden.** It's okay to be instructed in divination. It's not okay to eat forbidden foods.

I'm not saying it's wise to willingly subject ourselves to worldly indoctrination. We've chosen homeschooling for this reason. I'm saying in some situations we have no other choice. We shouldn't willingly watch cheezy health and wealth preachers or New Age gurus. If work mandates sensitivity training to indoctrinate you with transgender ideology, attend the classes and keep providing for your family. Just stand firm in your faith. Treasure God's word. Reject rebellion against God.

There's a difference between being taught error and practicing sin. A Christian doctor can expose themselves to godless indoctrination while training for the job. But a doctor can't practice abortion. Do you get the difference? We can't practice what God's word condemns. And never embrace ideologies contrary to God's word!

About three times in 12 years the Shipyard forced me to work on Sunday morning. I submitted. I could have refused, called in sick, made my boss look bad, delayed the work, quit my job and lose my house. My conscience wasn't so sensitive that I couldn't serve God in the employment he gave to me. Same with Daniel.

Point 3: God gives the four youths abilities (1:17-21)

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. – 1:17

What? God helped them learn Babylonian literature? Yes. To be expert in astrology and omens and pagan gods? Yes. God gave them special ability to learn and skill to use what they learned.

How were they superior to the king's magicians and enchanters? First, they used information better. Decision-making. Their ability to evaluate the best course of action.

Second, they had information others didn't have access to.

Daniel was given supernatural ability to understand visions and dreams. This insight was hidden from the magicians and enchanters.

The end of the chapter is a footnote indicating Daniel spent 67 years in Babylon. The first year of Cyrus was **539 BC**.

Application: protection within, not removal from

God wasn't going to overthrow Babylon anytime soon. Jeremiah revealed they'd be in Babylon for 70 years and his message was settle in, have children, multiply, and seek the good of Babylon (Jer 29:4-10). Maybe Daniel knew this? Regardless, he knew about the 70 years by the end of his time in Babylon (Dan 9:1). **Daniel's task was to be faithful in Babylon, in whatever circumstance God directed.**

God sustained Daniel by turning the heart of Ashpanaz.

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will. – Proverbs 21:1

No heart is free from the influence of God. God is so sovereign that he turns hearts to help his people! Trust that God wisely acts for you! [That's steadfast love following you all the days of your life – Ps 23:6]

God also protected his people by imparting abilities. Trust God to help you thrive in the places he gives you.

God places Daniel and his friends in the situation. God leaves them in the situation. God acts for them in the situation. Sounds a little like *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:13).

Application: parenting

I guess it is possible for a student to endure four years of public high school and come out godly with exceptional courage and confidence in God. That's where my head went when meditating on this chapter.

The issue isn't the indoctrination. It's the faith of the student. Daniel went into high school with a strong faith! And God's steadfast love. A Christian teenager can come out of public high school with a stronger faith! A Christian teenager can thrive because God gives favor and ability! I would note Daniel had believing peers who walked with him. This helped.

Application: questions to ask your teenager

Do you believe that everything God says and does is right and good? Where does your allegiance lie?

Do you believe that God is wise? Is he wisely guiding your life?

Do you believe that God is sovereign?

Do you regularly confess sin?

Do you regularly ask God for help in fighting sin?

Do you pray throughout the day (anxious, temptation, sinful patterns, laziness, favor, enablement, for others)?

Do you think about God's word throughout the day? Is God getting five minutes of your day?

Do you regularly practice what you're learning? Are you a hearer or a doer?

Do you have a passion to share the gospel with non-Christians?

Do you have a passion to honor God in every area of your life?

With these questions you're asking do you have faith? Faith isn't just agreement with biblical facts. Faith is turning from sin to trust Christ (repentance). Faith is thankfulness and confidence and allegiance. Faith is admission of brokenness and need for divine aid. Faith is the root of resolve and endurance in hard places.

What I'm getting at is we need a big view of God. A God who comes to our aid. A God who turns hearts in our favor and gives us ability to honor him in the places he gives to us. Life isn't about hiding out. Going to seven Bible studies a week and gaining head knowledge and keeping that knowledge to ourselves. Life is about faithfully navigating the places and callings God gives to us.

Non-Christian

God gives people to judgment. Because he's holy and doesn't tolerate sin. So God commands everyone to repent.

God offers salvation to everyone, to you, on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus died on the cross to save a people from their sins. God says trust me. Become one of my people. Don't trust in this broken world and its philosophies. Social justice or whatever the cause may be can't fix what's wrong inside you and forgive your sins.

You can be reconciled to God right now. It's as simple as trusting in Jesus for pardon. Two ways to live. Under God's judgment or under God's blessing.

Conclusion

Christian, God gives his people hard places. Christian, God gives help in those hard places.