

**CHAPTER 18, DANIEL IN EXILE****TIMELESS TRUTH: THE FAITHFUL PROSPER WHILE THE FAITHLESS FALL.****CHAPTER SUMMARY**

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 in his exclusive three-year "How to Live Like a Babylonian" Training Academy. Students 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.

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. Failure was no big deal except for the accompanying death sentence. 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, Meshach, Shadrach, 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 felt "duty bound" to bring such dangerous 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.

Bonhoeffer was not the first man to face death for standing firm in his faith. Daniel and his three friends faced death for their faith in YHWH and for resisting the worship of foreign gods. Together they teach us a valuable “how-to” lesson in faithful living in a foreign land.

- I. *Daniel in Exile*: Daniel did not choose to become a captive to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. There were many things that Daniel did not choose, but rather were chosen for him. He was taken captive as a young man of probably fifteen or sixteen years of age. His circumstances as a young man of nobility in Jerusalem dictated that he be taken in the first siege but also that he be groomed in the foreign palace to serve the king. We have to marvel that this young man who, so firmly grounded in his faith, prospered against great odds without the slightest hint of ethical or religious compromise. Daniel serves as an excellent case study for faithful living in a foreign land. He was an A.L.I.E.N.
  - A. *Associations*: Daniel developed a close community of like-minded faithful friends. Together they committed to resist the king's food and strong drink. Although the four were exiles, they were treated to a life of luxury and privilege. They were not enslaved in the traditional sense. Together they resisted the lure of unlawful luxuries. Their relationship with one another was especially important during their time of transition from Judah to Babylon. Together they refused to bow down to the golden idol. Together they faced the fiery furnace. When Daniel was promoted, he asked that his friends also be promoted to positions of influence. Their friendship served to strengthen their faith and their resolve in the face of temptation and persecution.
  - B. *Live Peaceably*: Daniel and his friends chose to live peaceably in Babylon. They used a great deal of tact and discernment with government officials. When given food from the king's table, they respectfully asked for an alternative diet and test. Daniel used wisdom and tact when dealing with the king's commander and Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Even when the decree was issued that forbade Daniel to pray to His God, he peaceably went to his room to pray as usual. He lived peaceably under various kings and even kingdoms.
  - C. *Identity*: Immediately after Daniel and his friends were chosen for the king's academy of Chaldean Culture, the commander assigned them new names. Their Hebrew names all reflected devotion to God in some way. Daniel's name means, “My judge is God;” Hananiah's name means, “Yahweh has been gracious.” Their new names were associated with Babylonian gods. By changing their names from the Hebrew God to the Babylonian gods, they would be seen as under the control of the new gods. This ancient practice would have encouraged these young men to assimilate themselves into their new culture and separate themselves from their former Israelite culture. The Babylonians could impose outward changes, but they could not change the inward identity of these young men. They held fast to YHWH and grounded their identity in Him.
  - D. *Engage*: While Daniel and the others could have refused to participate in the social and political life in Babylon, they did not. Instead, they fully engaged in life where they were exiled. Though aliens, they did not keep to themselves in small Israelite enclaves. They became more than fully functioning members of society; they became leaders in a foreign land! They were leaders under various regimes and prospered through the knowledge, wisdom, skills and favor of the LORD.
  - E. *Non-negotiables*: Daniel chose his friends wisely. He lived peaceably in a foreign land. He maintained his identity as a man of God all the while recognizing and respecting the governmental authorities placed over him. But he also knew what was non-negotiable. He and

his friends refused to bow down and pay homage as ordered by the king. They faced death in the fiery furnace and the lion's den for their faith. These men had been compliant, cooperative servants of foreign kings but were now persecuted for their religious practices. They would not break the Law by bowing down. They knew the LORD *could* rescue them from the flames and the felines, but they did not have a guarantee that He *would*. They stood firm anyway.

- II. *Exiles on the earth*: Is there an application for us, the Church? What do we have in common with Daniel and the three friends? The New Testament writers remind us that we also are "foreigners." The author of Hebrews recounted the faith of Abraham and Sarah who lived as aliens in the land of promise but were looking for the city whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:9-10). They confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth who desire a heavenly country and because of this, God was not ashamed to be called their God (Hebrews 11:13-16). Peter wrote to those "who reside as aliens" to abstain from their worldly lusts (1 Peter 1:2, 2:11-12). Paul wrote to the church in Philippi that "our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20) and our blessings are heavenly (Ephesians 1). We have been raised up and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). Yes, Church, we too are aliens. Therefore, we can model our own lives after the ALIEN Daniel.
- A. *Associations*: We were never meant to go it alone. God created us to live in community with one another and the Church is the Body of Christ. We are to be members of one Body and therefore responsible for and in harmony with one another (1 Corinthians 12). Believers are called to love one another to demonstrate to the world that we are disciples of Jesus (John 13:34-35). We are to be devoted to, honor, accept, and admonish one another (Romans 12:10, 15:7, 14). We are to serve one another, be kind to one another and be subject to one another (Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:32, 5:21). As Christians, we want to encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). We are to bear one another's burdens and correct and restore our fallen brethren (Galatians 6:1-2). Our Christian community is necessary for a vital relationship with Christ! Choose your associations carefully so that they will help you stand firm in your faith.
- B. *Live Peaceably*: Christians are called to be subject to our governmental authorities and to be peaceable and considerate of all mankind (Titus 3:1-2). Though we are aliens in this world, we *are* in this world and should represent Christ to the unbelieving world. Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and encouraged them to live peaceably there. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). How much more, then, should we strive to live peaceably with other believers! Paul corrected the Corinthian believers who were splintering into various groups (1 Corinthians 1). Moreover, our homes should be marked by peace. We should strive to have peace in our marriages, with our children, and with our extended family.
- C. *Identity*: Like Daniel, our identity is in Christ Jesus. We reside in a "foreign land," but our identity should remain tethered to Christ. Believers are all sons and daughters of God by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26) and therefore clothed in Him (Galatians 3:27). We have been sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). In Christ, you are complete (Colossians 2:10). We resist becoming conformed to the world by the ongoing renewal of our minds as we live as life sacrificed to the Lord (Romans 12:1-2).
- D. *Engage*: Engage wherever you are! Engage in the social, political and daily life of the community in which God places you. While Israel was and is a nation, the Church is not a nation in the traditional sense. We are scattered throughout a neighborhood, a city, and the world. Some Christians are in prisons while others are in positions of great power and

privilege. Prosper there. Practice good citizenship. Participate in the political process that shapes our city, state, and nation. Some Christians withdraw from the world to protect themselves from its defilement. Jesus did not live that way. He engaged His community. Adaptation is not synonymous with conformity. We can become leaders in our communities and workplaces. What better way to change a business, a school, a neighborhood or a nation than to be an engaged “foreigner” whose character is trustworthy like Daniel’s, neither corrupt nor negligent (p. 258). Jesus did not ask the Father to take us from the world, but to protect us from the evil one while we are here as aliens (John 17:15).

- E. *Non-negotiables*: We have to know what our non-negotiables are and stand firm for them in our faith. As we become fully devoted, mature followers of Christ, we identify those things for which we are willing to be persecuted. These may interrupt living peaceably, as it did for Daniel. They may interrupt your work or your relationships. But that takes us back to our A: Associations. Through the support of our Christian community, we gain the extra support to stand firm in our non-negotiables. As ALIENS in this world, we have to know what is and is not negotiable, what is and is not worth sacrificing for, perhaps even dying for.
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## Questions

1. Daniel stands out among the prophets. How is he like other Old Testament prophets and how is he different?
2. Jerusalem and God’s Temple were in ruins and most of the Jews were living in exile. It is easy to see how one could lose faith. What helped them hold on to faith? What helps you hold on to faith when you experience difficulties?
3. Look back at God’s covenant with Abraham (p. 13 or Gen. 12:1-3). How was it fulfilled through Daniel and his three friends?
4. Compare the story of Daniel with the story of Joseph. Do you view difficulties the way they did? Why or why not?
5. List the various ways that God revealed His supernatural power in this chapter. What message did God’s actions send to the exiles? What impression did He make on the gentile leaders?
6. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden idol, they did not know whether God would save them or not. How do you stand up for God when you know the results could be disastrous?
7. How did Daniel regard the various governmental authorities? Look up Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, and Titus 3:1. How should Christians regard governments?
8. How did God show Himself to be sovereign over human kingdoms and rulers? How does this help you view our world today?