



# THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Studies in the book of Daniel  
**PART ONE:** Weeks 1-7  
 Group Applications  
 Personal Study





# A Note from Your Pastors

Growing up in the church, Daniel for me was one of the “go to” Old Testament books. It was here that I could draw spiritual inspiration and learn important moral lessons about how to be more faithful. I can still remember the Sunday School felt board figures of Daniel in the Lion’s Den and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Fiery Furnace! If I was just obedient and trusted God, like them, everything would turn out swell. “Dare to be a Daniel” was our anthem and rallying cry.



What we will find out in this sermon series is that the lives of Daniel and his friends were very often anything but “swell.” Permanently stripped from their homes and families, dropped into a strange land and then forced to serve a cruel king at great personal cost, “exile” was not what they had dreamed about growing up in Israel. Yet, writing about these events decades later, Daniel testifies to the faithfulness of God in caring for His people in an inhospitable land. Everything that is happening to the nation of Israel is under the sovereign plan of God and is being actively used by Him to accomplish His purposes. Daniel was written in part to show Israel that they could have hope in the midst of their exile.

Many of us might have begun to feel these same tensions in our own lives as we attempt to walk out our faith in an increasingly hostile culture. One of my prayers is that God would use this study to re-establish our hope in Him and His rule over the scope of human drama, including our own cultural context. God doesn’t ask us to change the world, He just asks His people to set up shop and be faithful in an inhospitable land, to serve others through our words and works. We are thus asking God to give the Four Oaks family, through this series, a renewed sense of hope and encouragement for present and future trials. We are asking Him to give us Hope in Exile.

Praying for You,

*Paul Gilbert*

Pastor Paul

Lead Pastor

Four Oaks Community Church

# Week 1 Daniel 1:1–7

## The Story So Far

*And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.*

### **Deuteronomy 30:1-3**

When God founded the nation of Israel, he made a covenant, or an agreement or contract between two parties. God's covenant with Israel boiled down to this: if Israel obeys God's commands and worships him alone, they will be blessed in their land, but if they disobey and turn to other gods, they will be cursed (Deuteronomy 30: 15-20). And if they keep disobeying, God will take them out of their land and "cast them into another land" (Deuteronomy 29:27-28).

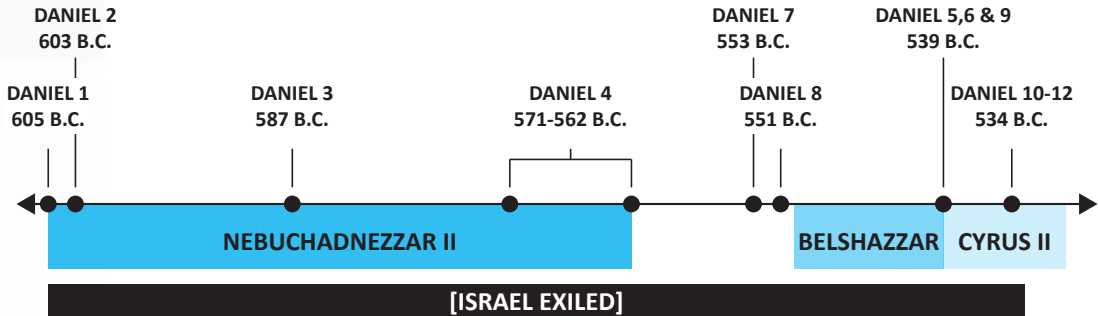
Israel's history with God up to this point has been pretty rough. They've had a bunch of bad kings, a nasty civil war that split the nation in two, and a tidal wave of invasions and assaults that left their nation battered; and to top it all off, Israel knew they had brought God's curse upon themselves by their unfaithfulness to God. For a time, Israel kept it together, fending off enemies and enjoying occasional periods of peace, all the while continuing in disobedience. Finally, God sent the mighty empire of Babylon to invade Israel and take them into captivity.

But hope is not lost, for God promised in Deuteronomy that if Israel repented, God's mercy and grace would flood over them and restore them from exile. It is with this promise that Daniel enters into the darkness of Babylon. It is with this promise that God's people find hope in a hostile world.

## Week 1 Sermon Notes



## Book of Daniel Timeline



The book of Daniel is split into two parts. Chapters 1-6 tell the story of Daniel and his friends living in a hostile world while trying to be faithful to God. Chapters 7-12 collect various visions of the future that Daniel interprets to give the readers of his book hope that God is in control and that he acts on behalf of his people.

## Main Characters

**Daniel:** As a teenager, Daniel was a member of the first wave of Israelites to be deported into Babylon, and spent most of his life in exile. The prophet Ezekiel knew Daniel and characterized him as righteous and wise (Ez 14:14, 20). Daniel lived 85 years in exile and spent most of it climbing up the ladder of Nebuchadnezzar's courts while maintaining a faithful witness to God. He wrote Daniel in order to encourage the Jews in exile that God is in control of everything, even the king of Babylon, and that God never abandons his people.

**Nebuchadnezzar II:** King of Babylon from 605-562 B.C. He oversaw the construction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. He was powerful, ruthless, and ambitious, and his empire was a dominant world power.

## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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2) Break the passage down into 3-4 sections and give each section a title.

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3) Write down 3-5 observations about the passage. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why questions.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## **GROW**

What are two or three characteristics of God you hope to learn about in Daniel?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## **GO**

What is your biggest fear when it comes to sharing the gospel? What are some ways in which you hope Daniel can speak to those fears?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.



## Discussion Questions

1) Talk about a time when you visited or lived in a different culture. Share any funny or memorable stories.

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2) It seems that our American culture is changing quite rapidly. How would you characterize the current world we live in? How does that make you think and/or feel?

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3) To what extent does our culture compare to Daniel's culture in Babylon? How does God's call upon Daniel's life relate to God's call upon ours?

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4) As we launch into our study of Daniel, how do you desire to grow in your walk with the Lord? How can your group help you and pray for you?

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## Short Reading

From “With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology” by James M. Hamilton<sup>1</sup>

### From Eden to the end: Daniel in Old Testament salvation history

The Old Testament sketches in the contours of the history and future of the world. The treatment is not exhaustive, but this literature answers major world view questions: Who made us? Who are we? How did we get here? What has gone wrong? What is the maker doing to set things right? How will things turn out in the end?

The Old Testament’s answers to these questions are the intellectual matrix in which Daniel writes. In order to understand the particular contribution of the book of Daniel, we begin with an attempt to map the highway of God’s purposes in salvation history, the causeway that begins at creation and continues to new creation. This exercise in the cartography of salvation history, charting God’s plan for the ages of the world, will begin with what Moses prophesies about the future of the history of Israel. From this starting point in the Torah we will survey the contribution of the Former and Latter Prophets, before focusing on the way that Daniel latches on to the Law and the Prophets and points forward to the end of the exile and the consummation of all things.

### The history of Israel’s future in the Torah

God built a cosmic temple in which he placed his image, giving him a suitable helper and commanding him to exercise dominion. The man was charged to subdue all the dry lands as that they would be part of the garden of God’s glory (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15, 18). When God’s image transgressed, God exiled man and woman from the land of life. Banished from God’s presence to the cursed and barren ground east of Eden, Adam named his wife Eve as an act of faith in response to the word of judgment promising that the serpent would meet his fate at the feet of the skull-crushing seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15, 20). Genesis then carefully traces the line of descent through a ten-member genealogy from Adam to Noah (Gen. 5); then through another ten-member genealogy from Noah’s son Shem to Abram (Gen. 11). To Abram God promised blessings, blessings that correspond to and promise to overcome the curses (cf. Gen. 3:14-19 and 12:1-3).

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, James M. *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2014, pp. 41-44

## ***From Abraham to the curses of the covenant***

The promises made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) were passed to his son Isaac (26:2-4), who then passed them to his son Jacob (27:27-29; 28:3-4). Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph with the birthright (Gen. 48:15-16; 1 Chr. 5:1), 'yet Judah became great among his brother, and the prince came from him' (1 Chr. 5:2, cs. Gen. 49:8-12).

God declared the sojourn in Egypt to Abraham before it came to pass (Gen. 15:13); then as promised he brought Israel out of Egypt through mighty acts of judgment (15:14, cf. Exod. 6:6). Yahweh glorified himself over Pharaoh (Exodus 14), entered into covenant with Israel at Sinai (19 - 24), gave them instructions for the tabernacle (25 - 31), renewed the covenant and revealed himself to Moses after the golden calf outrage (32 - 34); then took up residence in the tabernacle, previewing the way his glory would fill the cosmos (35 - 40).

At Sinai, Moses instructed Israel in Leviticus 1-25 on how to live with a holy God, and, significantly for our purposes, this included instructions about sabbatical years and the year of jubilee. Both the sabbatical year cycles and the jubilee are relevant for understanding Daniel 9 and what the seventy weeks indicate about the consummation of history. Moses taught Israel to work the land for six years; then to let it rest in the seventh (Lev. 25:1-7). He went on to tell them that they should count 'seven Sabbaths of years', totaling forty-nine years, the fiftieth year being the jubilee (25:8-17). On the Day of Anointment in the forty-ninth year they were to sound the trumpet (25:9), proclaiming liberty, everyone returning to their clans and lands (25:10).

After these instructions, Moses began to lay out the blessings and curses of the covenant in Leviticus 26, prophesying the history of Israel's future as he did so. Both Leviticus 25 and 26 are vital for understanding the exile, the kingdom of God described in Daniel, and the revelation made in Daniel 9.

### ***The curses of the covenant in Leviticus 26: significant sevens and sets of sevens***

Moses presented the blessings of obedience to the covenant in Leviticus 26:1-13. These culminate in a promise of the renewal of the experience of Eden, Yahweh walking among his people. Moses followed these promised blessings of Yahweh's presence with ominous curses. If they obey, Yahweh will walk among them; if they disobey, he will 'walk contrary' to them (Lev. 26:24).

Several times in these curses Yahweh declared through Moses that he would discipline Israel 'sevenfold' for their sins (Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28). After these four statements that Yahweh would discipline Israel 'sevenfold for your sins', Moses announced to them that when Yahweh exiled them from the land, scattering them among the nations (26:33), the land would enjoy the sabbatical years that Israel disobediently refused to give it (26:34-35). Later in this chapter we will examine the relationship between Jeremiah 25 and 29, Daniel 9 and 2 Chronicles 36, and those texts build on the Leviticus 26 declaration that the land would enjoy its Sabbaths and that Yahweh would punish Israel sevenfold for her sins. Moses went on to prophesy that after the land had its rest, after the people were punished sevenfold for their sins, when they confessed their sin, humbled their hearts and made amends for their sin, Yahweh would remember his covenant (Lev. 26:40-45).

## **Restoration in the latter days**

A similar schema regarding the history of Israel's future—without the specifics of the sevenfold punishment and the land being repaid the denied sabbaticals—is announced by Moses in Deuteronomy 4:26-31, and then elaborated upon in Deuteronomy 28-32. The sequence of broken covenant, discipline culminating in exile, followed by repentance and eschatological restoration is then narrated in the Former and Latter Prophets and sung in the Writings.

Having prophesied the exile after Israel breaks the covenant in Deuteronomy 4:25-28, Moses makes a significant reference to 'the latter days' in 4:29-30, 'But from there you will seek Yahweh your God and you will find him, if you search for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these words find you in the latter days, you will return to Yahweh your God and hear his voice.'



# Week 2 Daniel 1:8–21

## A Holy Nation

*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.*

### Exodus 19:5-6

What does it mean to be a nation? In the modern day, a nation is defined by its borders and laws. If an American revokes his or her citizenship and becomes French, he or she is no longer under the jurisdiction of the American government. That person no longer submits to the laws and regulations of the United States, but is now under French law.

Israel, however, was different. Of all the nations in the world, Israel had the distinct privilege of being chosen by God. In Exodus 19, God spoke to Moses, telling him that Israel was to be his “treasured possession,” “kingdom of priests,” and a “holy nation.” Israel’s identity as God’s people meant that they dressed, ate, governed, and behaved in ways that set them apart from the rest of the world. In other words, Israel was a nation defined by holiness.

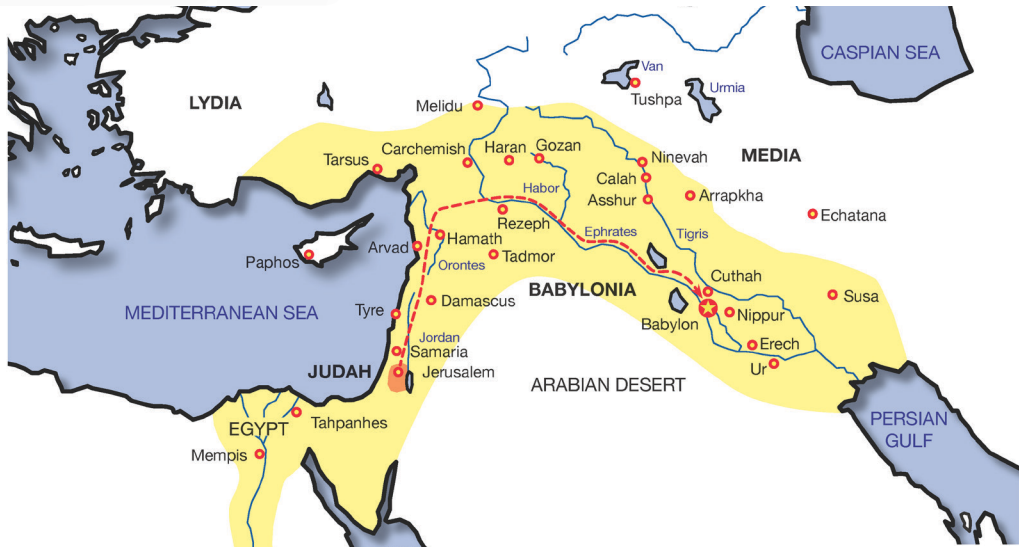
Now when did God speak these words? At Mount Sinai, about fifty miles away from Jerusalem. When did he speak? Before Israel ever had a Temple or a King. In other words, God expected Israel to be holy whether or not they were in their homeland. Perhaps Daniel had this simple thought —“Lord, we are in a foreign land, under a foreign king, being educated in a foreign culture, but you are still our God. And we are still your people.”

Listen again to God’s words to Moses: “You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.” Unlike earthly governments, God’s rule knows no boundaries. He is never outside of his jurisdiction. God owned Babylon. God owned Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel lived knowing that his God was in control of history and that so long as God acted like God, Israel needed to act like Israel.

## ▶ Week 2 Sermon Notes



## Map of Domination of Babylonian Empire



## Main Characters

**Daniel:** In this chapter, Daniel faces a predicament: how does he honor the laws of his land while maintaining faithfulness to God? Ultimately, Daniel's predicament centers around fear — fear of man or fear of God. He knows he cannot choose both — and neither can we. Yet despite Daniel's refusal to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's demands, he maintained a posture of humility. He learned skill in all literature and wisdom, not just the works of his Jewish heritage, but Babylon's as well. In other words, Daniel was able to live within and understand his culture without being consumed by it. And God blessed his efforts.

**Nebuchadnezzar II:** Nebuchadnezzar wanted more than Daniel's allegiance — he wanted Daniel to be assimilated into Babylonian culture. One of the quickest ways to erase a person's culture is to change their name, which is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did. He gave Daniel ("God is my judge"), Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious"), Mishael ("Who is what God is?") and Azariah ("Yahweh is a helper") new names based on the Babylonian gods Marduk, Bel, and Nebo.



## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## GROW

What characteristics of holiness and obedience to God does Daniel display in this passage?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## GO

How would you explain holiness to a non-believer?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.

## Discussion Questions

1) Have you ever been in a place of testing like Daniel? If so, describe the situation. How did God help you through it?

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2) Talk about how Daniel and his 3 friends supported and encouraged one another. What does that teach us about the importance of community, particularly in times of difficulty?

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3) How did God bless the faithfulness of Daniel and his 3 friends? Did this blessing extend to others as well?

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4) What can we learn from Daniel and his friends in how they related to their culture and how we are called by God to relate to ours? Share a particular way your group can pray for you in this regard.

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## Short Reading

### From “The World-Tilting Gospel” by Dan Philips<sup>1</sup>

God’s holiness overarches and gloriously radiates through all of His attributes. If we want to understand God’s love, we must know that it is a holy love. If we think of His goodness, it is a holy goodness. His righteousness is a holy righteousness, His wisdom a holy wisdom, His power a holy power. There is no “God is holy, but”; there is only “God is holy, and.” What is holiness, then? Both the meaning and use of the words teach us that the basic idea of holiness is separation, apartness, transcendence. In His holiness, God is indeed the Wholly Other. He has no rival, no peer, no equal. All analogies to God are necessarily distant and incomplete. This is true both as to His being and His moral character. Moses sang, Who is like You among the gods, Yahweh? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exod. 15:11 DJP) This note of the incomparability, the holy otherness of God, is a large and recurrent theme in Scripture (cf. Exod. 8:10; 1 Sam. 2:2; Pss. 35:10; 71:19; 77:13; 89:6; 113:5; Isa. 44:7; etc.). He is high and lofty, removed from mankind, and His name is Holy (Isa. 57:15). That is, unlike everything else, God is self-existent and dependent on absolutely nothing for His being. By contrast, all created things are dependent from the first nanosecond of their existence, and so they continue onward through every subsequent moment. In their every thought and breath, every last creature depends upon God (Ps. 104:27–30; Dan. 5:23). All things hold together, even at the subatomic level, only by the sustaining work of God the Son (Col. 1:17).

The reverse is not true (Acts 17:24–25). God is independent of creation. Perhaps some illustrations of the impact of God’s holiness will help us break this truth down. Recall Moses’ encounter with Yahweh at the burning bush. In that moment, Moses was warned to take the sandals off his feet, since the manifest presence of Yahweh made it “holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). How so? Super-soil? Dyno-dirt? Not at all. That plot of ground was set apart from all other ground, because God was appearing there, at that moment. His holy presence hallowed the site. No “historical marker” along America’s highways can approach the dignity of this place, made holy by the visible manifestation of the very presence of God. Or again, God set apart (“made holy”) the seventh day as the day on which He rested (Gen. 2:3), and He later told Israel to do the same, to set it apart from all others (Exod. 20:8). Saturday, for the Jew, would be different from Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and the rest. It must be distinct, different. An even more vivid illustration is the tabernacle. The whole structure

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, Dan. *The World-tilting Gospel: Embracing a Biblical Worldview & Hanging on Tight*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011. Kindle Edition.

was called a “holy” building. God called for a special ceremony, involving holy anointing oil (Exod. 30:25–26). This oil was of a distinctive mixture, and thus was set apart to God, withheld from common use (v. 32) on pain of being cut off from Israel (v. 33).

This oil was applied to the tabernacle structure, which made it holy, set it apart from all other structures in Israel (Exod. 40:9). The tabernacle wasn’t a lounge, a pool hall, a coffee shop. It was not a community center, where everyone could just stroll in and hang out. It was set apart to God’s ownership and service. It was separate, distinct. But back within that set-apart building was a smaller structure that was divided into two compartments. The first compartment was called the “Holy Place” (Heb. 9:2). It was doubly set apart/holy/sanctified: a set-apart compartment within the set-apart building. Priests (and only priests) entered in pursuit of their daily duties (v. 6). Beyond the “Holy Place” was a second compartment called “the Holy of Holies,” which in Hebrew syntax means “the Most Holy Place” (Exod. 26:33; Heb. 9:3). How was this partition “most set apart”? Virtually nobody in the world could enter it (Lev. 16:2)—certainly no Gentile, no common Israelite, no common priest, no king nor ruler. Only one man could ever enter that compartment: the high priest from the descendants of Aaron, who wore a crown engraved, “Holy to the LORD” (Exod. 28:36). Only he could cross the threshold, and even he could enter only on one day of the year, and that only with special ceremonies and offerings (Lev. 16:3ff.; Heb. 9:7).

So you see: “most holy” = most set apart. The whole tabernacle was constructed after a pattern that Yahweh showed Moses on the mountain (Exod. 25:40). That pattern communicated realities above and beyond the earthly structure. The tabernacle symbolically represented the throne and dwelling place of Yahweh (Exod. 25:22; cf. Heb. 8:5; 9:23–24; 10:1, 19–22), the thrice holy God of Israel. How can a thing such as a tent or a glorified barbecue be called “holy”? They have no special, magical properties in themselves. They are all created objects. What makes them “holy”? They are “holy” by virtue of association with God. God is the original; He is the definition; He is the source. God naturally possesses holiness by virtue of being God. Holiness is not conferred on God, or achieved by Him. He is holy because He is who He is. He is “the Holy One of Israel.” When we give Him a holy place as Lord in our hearts (Isa. 8:13; 1 Peter 3:15), we add nothing to Him. We are only crediting Him with being what He is in truth. Because of this perfection of beauty in God’s being, He is ethically or morally apart. I think we can say that God is not holy because He does holy things; but God does do holy things—and only holy things—because He is holy.

God alone is permanently, utterly, and immovably consistent with His moral excellence, His righteousness. He does only what is right and good; He is capable of doing only what is right and good (Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31; Pss. 92:15; 97:2; Jer. 9:24; Hab. 1:13). In connection with this,

we notice how anyone and everyone who receives a vision of God in Scripture is overwhelmed with His holiness. Consider how Isaiah the prophet is overcome by God's radiant, transcendent purity. Everything we know about Isaiah is positive. He is a godly man, a faithful prophet, a literary genius. Yet when Isaiah beholds the angels celebrating God's holiness, he spontaneously cries out in terror and shame, and needs to have atonement applied to him (Isa. 6:5). Consider Job, who was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Nonetheless, the sight of God drove Job to unconditional self-loathing repentance (42:5–6). As Yahweh affected OT believers, so did the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. A brief glimpse of Christ's nature drove Peter to his knees, unable to bear His presence (Luke 5:8). And neither can we bear His presence. The tremendous reality of God's holiness gives us a glimpse of our massive dilemma. It is easy to sum up our dismal predicament in two succinct points: 1. God is holy. 2. We aren't.

And there is our nightmarish quandary. We are unholy. How can unholy creatures have a relationship with such a holy God? We are heading toward the answer to that question. At present, however, we are still talking about who God is in Himself.



# Week 3 Daniel 2

## Hope in a Hostile World

*Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."*

**Genesis 41:14-16**

Israel's exile in Babylon was not their first experience of oppression. Thousands of years earlier, Pharaoh called Joseph into his courts asking for an interpretation of a disturbing dream. Joseph, a prisoner and exile in a foreign land, was raised up by God at the right time to declare his Word to one of the most powerful men in the world. He was no revolutionary. He did not fight Pharaoh's guards or disrespect his authority, but he lived in quiet faithfulness and refused to compromise his convictions for comfort.

Daniel 2 brings us a new Joseph, another prisoner and exile in a foreign land with nothing but a promise from God. He was in a different land with a different king but with the same God. Like Joseph, Daniel respected the authorities and lived among the Babylonians, but remained faithful to God in his convictions. He lived a quiet life in humility, waiting for the time when God would use him to accomplish his purposes. And what an incredible purpose it was — he informed Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom was temporary. It was going to fall. And not only that, but the kingdom after him would fall, and the one after that. In fact, every human kingdom would fall at the feet of God's eternal kingdom. Daniel was able to serve the king because he belonged to a greater King. He was able to live as an honorable citizen because his true citizenship was in heaven.

Why did Daniel have hope in a hostile world? He knew how Joseph's story ended — with the exodus, God himself delivering his people from their suffering and calling them to himself. This is Daniel's lifeline and he's holding onto it with everything he's got.

Our faithfulness to God in the face of opposition and hostility depends on what we think about God. Is God the author of history? Or he is scrambling trying to keep up with us? Will he be faithful to his Word? Our great hope is that God is sovereign. That he is in control and we, thankfully, are not. God's rule over us is what allows us to respect our rulers no matter how imperfect they are, because the true kingdom is coming, the one to which we really belong, and it will put all other kingdoms to shame.



## Week 3 Sermon Notes



## The Statue of Nebuchadnezzar



### **Head: Nebuchadnezzar/Babylonian Empire**

The Neo-Babylonian empire, also known as the Chaldean empire, was a major world power from 626 BC to 539 BC.

### **Chest/Arms: Median/Persian Empire**

The Median Empire was a smaller empire that took over Babylon and reigned from 678 BC to 549 BC. In 553 BC, Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, conquered the Median empire and established the Persian empire.

### **Middle/Thighs (Bronze): Greek Empire**

Alexander the Great rapidly conquered Persia and established one of the largest empires in history. His rise led to the spreading of Greek culture and language. Alexander reigned until 323 BC.

### **Legs (Iron): Roman Empire**

Rome conquered the Greek empire and established one of the longest lasting empires of the ancient world. Rome was as “strong as iron” but also composed of various nations, cultures, and languages which led to its instability.

## Main Characters

**Daniel:** Daniel received direct and inerrant revelation from God, but he never boasted about it. In fact, he was left in awe at the utter sovereignty of God over all rulers and kings and authorities. It was because of Daniel’s high view of God’s sovereignty, that he was able to respond “with prudence and discretion” when asked to meet with Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel’s recognition of God as his ultimate king allowed him to respect Nebuchadnezzar as his present king.

**Nebuchadnezzar II:** Nebuchadnezzar, like Pharaoh, could not deny that God was with Israel. He could not deny that God was all-powerful. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar goes so far as to say that “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings.” But the book of James warns us that to believe in God is not enough, for even the demons believe and shudder! (James 2:19). Nebuchadnezzar saw the power of God but missed the vital element of repentance.

## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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2) Break the passage down into 3-4 sections and give each section a title.

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3) Write down 3-5 observations about the passage. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why questions.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## GROW

What is God trying to communicate to his people through these visions to Daniel?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## GO

Think about a non-Christian you know who grew up in the church. Are they familiar with the story of Daniel? What do they think Daniel is about? What ways can you use what you learned in this chapter to start a conversation with them about Daniel?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.

## Discussion Questions

1) Share a time when you experienced great opposition. How did you respond—good or bad?

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2) How did Daniel respond to opposition from the king? What lessons can we learn?

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3) God answered the prayers of Daniel and his friends. Share a time when God answered your prayers.

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4) What ways do you need to reach out to your group today and ask for prayer? Are there any ways you can thank God for things your group has been praying for?

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## Short Reading

### From “Surprised By Hope” by N.T. Wright<sup>1</sup>

We need to distinguish between the final kingdom and the present anticipation of it. The final coming together of heaven and earth is, of course, God’s supreme act of new creation, for which the only real prototype—other than the first creation itself—was the resurrection of Jesus. God alone will sum up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. He alone will make the “new heavens and new earth.” It would be the height of folly to think that we could assist in that great work.

But what we can and must do in the present, if we are obedient to the gospel, if we are following Jesus, and if we are indwelt, energized, and directed by the Spirit, is to build for the kingdom. This brings us back to 1 Corinthians 15:58 once more: what you do in the Lord is not in vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that’s shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that’s about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe in the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one’s fellow human beings and for that matter one’s fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God. God’s recreation of his wonderful world, which began with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God’s people live the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God’s new world. In fact, it will be enhanced there.

I have no idea what precisely this will mean in practice. I am putting up a signpost, not offering a photograph of what we will find once we get to where the signpost is pointing. I don’t know what musical instruments we shall have to play Bach in God’s new world, though I’m sure Bach’s music

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<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, James M. “Pp. 41-44.” *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2014. Print. pp. 208-209 .

will be there. I don't know how my planting a tree today will relate to the wonderful trees that there will be in God's recreated world, though I do remember Martin Luther's words about the proper reaction to knowing the kingdom was coming the next day being to go out and plant a tree. I do not know how the painting an artist paints today in prayer and wisdom will find a place in God's new world. I don't know how our work for justice for the poor, for remission of global debts, will reappear in that new world. But I know that God's new world of justice and joy, of hope for the whole earth, was launched when Jesus came out of the tomb on Easter morning, and I know that he calls his followers to live in him and by the power of his Spirit and so to be new-creation people here and now, bringing signs and symbols of the kingdom to birth on earth as in heaven. The resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit mean that we are called to bring real and effective signs of God's renewed creation to birth even in the midst of the present age. Not to bring works and signs of renewal to birth within God's creation is ultimately to collude, as Gnosticism always does, with the forces of sin and death themselves. But don't focus on the negative. Think of the positive: of the calling, in the present, to share in the surprising hope of God's whole new creation.



# Week 4 Daniel 3

## No Other God

*You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.*

### Exodus 34:13-16

If you grew up going to church, you probably learned the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego before you learned how to tie your shoes. This is not a story of the faith of the three men, however, but a story of the power of their God. Though Yahweh works behind the scenes, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are quick to acknowledge his presence (3:16-18), and Nebuchadnezzar eventually praises his power (3:28-29).

Chapter three continues the theme of this section of Daniel—Yahweh “changes times and seasons, deposing some kings and establishing others” (2:25). Yahweh had already demonstrated his power through the vegetables and water the Hebrews consumed. Mighty Yahweh had revealed Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation to Daniel (2:17-19). In this chapter Nebuchadnezzar encounters God’s mighty hand again.

The golden statue represents the pinnacle of Nebuchadnezzar’s strength and power. The Babylonians did not believe their king to be divine, so the statue was probably not an image of Nebuchadnezzar. It was most likely an image of Marduk, the principle deity of the Babylonians. When the subjects bowed to the statue, they proved they were loyal to the king and worshiped his gods (3:12, 15). But the living God Yahweh transcends all false gods. Convinced of this, the three men refused to bow.



## Week 4 Sermon Notes



## Main Characters

**Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego:** Nebuchadnezzar had changed these young men's names from their Hebrew names, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (respectively). Like Daniel, they were captives from Israel. Since the events from chapter two occurred during Nebuchadnezzar's second year as king (2:1), we know that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been living in Babylon for at least two years by the time the events in chapter three occur. They stood out among all the other wise men and astrologers in the king's service (1:19-20), and they oversaw the administration of the province of Babylon (2:49).

**The Golden Statue:** Although the statue wasn't alive, it does play an integral part of the story. It measured ninety feet tall and nine feet wide (one cubit is about eighteen inches). It most likely was not made entirely of gold but rather had a gold overlay (cf. Isa 40:19; Jer 10:3-4). The statue may have resembled Nebuchadnezzar, but it most likely was an image of one of the gods the Babylonians worshiped. Either way, it represented Nebuchadnezzar's strength and accomplishments.

## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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2) Break the passage down into 3-4 sections and give each section a title.

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3) Write down 3-5 observations about the passage. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why questions.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## **GROW**

Both chapters two and three feature statues. What are the differences between the statutes?

Compare the ending of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three. What is Daniel trying to tell his audience about God?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

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Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## **GO**

How does God's sovereignty inform a biblical view of history?

How would you explain the concept of idolatry to a non-believer?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.

## Discussion Questions

1) When did God come through for you in a powerful way? How did that increase your faith?

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2) We live in a world that's increasingly opposed to the gospel. What particular idols does our culture hold up to worship?

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3) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden image, and God protected and delivered them even through the fiery furnace. How can this story encourage and strengthen you?

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4) What is an idol that you're currently being tempted to bow down to rather than God? How can your group encourage and pray for you to see God as more satisfying?

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## Short Readings

### From “The New American Commentary: Daniel” (vol. 18) by Stephen R. Miller<sup>1</sup>

Does God have all power? Yes. Is God able to deliver believers from all problems and trials? Yes. But does God deliver believers from all trials? No. God may allow trials to come into the lives of his people to build character or for a number of other reasons (Rom 5). The purpose for trials may not always be understood, but God simply asks that his children trust him—even when it is not easy. As Job, who endured incredible suffering, exclaimed, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him” (Job 13:15). Although God does not guarantee that his followers will never suffer or experience death, he does promise always to be with them. In times of trial the believer’s attitude should be that of these young men (3:17–18).

Some of the most courageous words ever spoken are recorded in v. 18. Christ told his followers: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). This explains the confidence exhibited by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they declared, “But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” Even if they had to suffer a horrible, painful death in a burning oven, these three young men refused to forsake their God and worship idols. Similar words have been uttered countless times throughout the centuries as believers have suffered martyrdom for the Lord... Certainly these Hebrews were convinced that even if they perished in the flames, there was a better life beyond.

### From “How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil” by D.A. Carson<sup>2</sup>

When we suffer, there will sometimes be mystery. Will there also be faith?... In Christian thought, faith is never naive or sentimental gullibility. To be useful, faith depends on the reliability, the faithfulness, of its object. Faith that depends on a God who is a cruel tyrant or a cheap trickster will be bitterly disappointed in the end. For faith to be praiseworthy, it must repose in a faithful God. To provide a list of reasons as to why we Christians hold that God is worthy of all the faith that rests on him would turn this book into something it is not designed to be. But when Christians think seriously about evil and suffering, one of the paramount reasons we are so sure that God is to be

1 Stephen R. Miller, Daniel, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 120. (This book is easy to read – not too technical but gives good background info.)

2 D. A. Carson, How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 159–160.

trusted is because he sent his Son to suffer cruelly on our behalf. Jesus Christ, the Son who is to be worshiped as God, God's own agent in creation (John 1:2–3), suffered an excruciatingly odious and ignominious death. The God on whom we rely knows what suffering is all about, not merely in the way that God knows everything, but by experience.

This theme is so vast, and in various circles has become so popular, that it cries out for detailed discussion. But in this short chapter I make no pretense of offering a balanced treatment of what was accomplished on the cross. My concerns are narrower and more selective: I shall focus on four simple truths about the cross, all related to the theme of evil and suffering.”

**The section above is the most relevant, but here's a larger chunk as well:**

### **The Cross Is the Triumph of Justice and Love**

When we are convinced that we are suffering unjustly, we may cry out for justice. We want God to be just and exonerate us immediately; we want God to be fair and mete out suffering immediately to those who deserve it.

The trouble with such justice and fairness, however, is that, if it were truly just and truly fair and as prompt as we demand, we would soon be begging for mercy, for love, for forgiveness—for anything but justice. For very often what I really mean when I ask for justice is implicitly circumscribed by three assumptions, assumptions not always recognized: (1) I want this justice to be dispensed immediately; (2) I want justice in this instance, but not necessarily in every instance; and (3) I presuppose that in this instance I have grasped the situation correctly.

We need to examine these three assumptions. First, the Bible assures us that God is a just God, and that justice will be done in the end, and will be seen to be done. But when we urgently plead for justice, we usually mean something more than that. We mean we want vindication now! Second, to ask for such instantaneous justice in every instance is inconceivable: it would too often find me on the wrong side, too often find me implicitly inviting my own condemnation. But justice instantaneously applied only when it favors me is not justice at all. Selective justice that favors one individual above another is simply another name for corruption. And no one wants a corrupt God. And third, when I plead so passionately for justice, it is usually because I think I understand the situation pretty well. I wouldn't be quite so crass as actually to say I need to explain it to God, but that is pretty close to the way I act.

Someone might object that since the psalmist frequently appeals for justice, for vindication, it cannot be wrong to do so. And I agree, so long as those three hidden assumptions are not surreptitiously operating together. For instance, if the psalmist, or any believer since then for that matter, appeals to God for justice, not simply in this instance, but because God is a just God, the appeal is somewhat transformed. If such a believer also recognizes that the Lord's timing is perfect, that unless the Lord extends his mercy we will all be consumed (after all, the psalmist asks for mercy more often than he asks for vindication), and that sometimes our cries for justice cannot be more than vague but intense appeals for help, precisely because we do not understand what is going on very well, then the nasty, hidden assumptions that frequently mar our cries for justice have largely been done away with.

Suppose, for argument's sake, that God gave instant gratification for every good deed, every kind thought, every true word; and an instant jolt of pain for every malicious deed, every dirty thought, and every false word. Suppose the pleasure and pain were in strict proportion to the measure of goodness or badness God saw in us. What kind of world would result?

Many writers have asked this sort of question. They conclude that such a system would turn us into automata. We would not join in worship because of the intrinsic worth of God, but because it gave us selfish pleasure. We would not refrain from lying because it is wrong and abominated by the God we love, but because we wanted to avoid the next nasty jolt. We would not love our neighbor because our hearts had been transformed by the love of God, but because we preferred personal pleasure to personal pain.

I think that if God were to institute such a world order, things would be far worse yet. God does not look only on our external acts. He looks on our heart. Such a system of enforced and ruthlessly "just" discipline would not change our hearts. We would be smouldering with resentment. Our obedience would be external and apathetic; our hearts and devotion would not be won over. The jolts might initially gain protestations of repentance, but they would not command our allegiance. And since God examines the heart, he would be constantly administering the jolts. The world would become a searing pain; the world would become hell. Do you really want nothing but totally effective, instantaneous justice? Then go to hell.

There is another factor we must frankly face. When we ask for justice, we presuppose some sort of standard of justice. If the standards are God's standards, he has made them clear enough: the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We have returned to hell by another route.



We must be grateful that God is a God of justice. If God were not just, if there were no assurance that justice would be served in the end, then the entire moral order would collapse (as it has in atheistic humanism). But we must be equally grateful that God is not only a God of justice. He is a God of love, of mercy, of compassion, of forgiveness.

Nowhere is this more effectively demonstrated than in the cross. At one level, this was the most unjust act, the least fair act, in all of history. He who was sinless became our sin offering; he who had never rebelled against his heavenly Father was brutally executed by rebels; he who had never known what it was not to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength was abandoned by God, prompting him to cry out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” And it was this act, this most “unfair” act, that satisfied divine justice, and brought sinful rebels like me to experience God’s forgiveness, to taste the promise of an eternity of undeserved bliss.

In thinking about these things, there is an important and common error to be avoided. We must avoid the view that God the Father is characterized exclusively by justice and wrath, while his Son Jesus Christ is characterized exclusively by mercy and grace. In this view, the Son by his death somehow won over the Father, who would otherwise have simply wiped us out.

This will not do. The Father and Son are both described in Scripture as being, on the one hand, holy and therefore wrathful in the face of sin, and, on the other hand, full of compassion. It was because the Father loved the world that he sent his Son (John 3:16). It is therefore God himself who demonstrates his love for us in this fact: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). This does not mean that there is no sense in which Jesus’ death on the cross propitiates God, that is, makes God propitious, favorable toward us. But when Christians talk about the doctrine of propitiation, they do not mean to suggest (if they are at all knowledgeable) that Christ is the subject of propitiation and the Father is the object: the Son (subject) propitiates the Father (object). True, the Son is himself the “propitiation” for our sins (1 John 2:2; TNIV “atoning sacrifice”), since it is he who died, not the Father. But God is both the subject and the object of this propitiation. He is the subject, in that out of love he sends his Son to die and thus provides the sacrifice; he is the object, in that it is his own justice that is satisfied when his Son dies in place of sinners who deserve to come under the sentence of his justice. In this nuanced sense, one may speak of the Son propitiating the Father, but never in such a way that the Father and the Son have fundamentally different attitudes toward sinners and their sin.

As Paul says, it was God himself who presented his Son “as a sacrifice of atonement” (Rom. 3:25), or, better, as a propitiation, in his blood (that is, in his death on the cross). Then comes the most startling part. We might have expected Paul to say that God did this to demonstrate his love for fallen sinners. Instead, he says that God “did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25–26, emphasis added). In other words, God had not finally dealt with the sins of earlier generations, let alone with sins then being committed and still to be committed. But by sending his Son to the cross, he dealt with them, and thus demonstrated his justice. His justice demanded that sin be punished. How then could he let sinners go free, acquitted, uncondemned, declared just (“justified”) when in fact they were guilty? He sent his Son to die in their place. This bloody sacrifice, designed and purposed by God himself, enabled him simultaneously to forgive sinners and to retain the standards of his own justice. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor. 5:19, emphasis added). His Son died where sinners should have died. Thus God shows himself “to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”

The cross, then, is the place where God’s justice and love meet. God retains the integrity of his justice; God pours out the fullness of his love. In the cross, God shows himself to be just and the one who justifies sinners whose faith rests in his Son. The death of God’s own Son is the only adequate gauge of what God thinks of my sin; the death of God’s own Son is the only basis on which I may be forgiven that sin. The cross is the triumph of justice and love.

You might think we have strayed a long way from the problem of evil and suffering. What I have tried to show, however, is that when we utter anguished cries for “justice,” simple justice, we do well to think through what we are saying. There is no doubt a place for asking God to display his justice in a particular case. But such requests must not presuppose that justice is the only thing we need, or that we are more just than God, or that we can afford to tell God that he is not just enough. Justice alone will destroy us all. Only the triumph of justice and love will meet our needs; and this triumph is so integrally linked to the very heart of the gospel, the cross of God’s dear Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, that we dare not, as Christians, take our eyes off this perspective.



# Week 5 Daniel 4

## The King of Kings

*It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him.*

**Jeremiah 27:5-6**

In this chapter we see most vividly the ultimate unhindered sovereignty of The Most High God. Here is Israel in captivity to a wicked nation and King; but how did they get here, and what was God's involvement? Though Israel was so prone to forget the words and works of God, he had made it plain to them through his prophets. They had been a lawless wicked people bowing to the idols of the nations. God in his jealous love and discipline, unwilling to watch them walk away from him, sent prophets to warn them. When they would not listen, God himself sovereignly orchestrated Israel to be taken captive to Babylon. Because the false prophets denied God's hand in it, he spoke through Jeremiah, making clear that God orders the affairs of every nation and ruler for his own purposes, even the great King Nebuchadnezzar.

Even though it is true that "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Proverbs 21:1), he is still responsible for his pride and lawlessness. So here we are at the sovereign intervention of the Most High himself. In this chapter, the theme of God's sovereignty displays itself in God's freedom to appoint and govern whomever he pleases in every government (Romans 13), the means God uses to effect his purposes, and the humbling effect that this awesome truth has upon mankind.

## Week 5 Sermon Notes



## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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2) Break the passage down into 3-4 sections and give each section a title.

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3) Write down 3-5 observations about the passage. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why questions.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## **GROW**

How does Daniel's understanding of suffering affect our worries about the future?

Read 1 Corinthians 4:7. What does this tell us about God's rule over the world?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## **GO**

How does Daniel's interaction with the king inform how we engage with the world?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.

## Discussion Questions

1) Talk about a time you were humbled. What were the circumstances? What did you learn through it?

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2) Nebuchadnezzar was a man of great pride. In what ways do you struggle with pride?

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3) God greatly humbled Nebuchadnezzar for his boasting. In what ways do you see God's character and purposes through this story?

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4) Nebuchadnezzar closes with an amazing prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Close your time with prayer, giving praise and thanking God for who He is and what He's done for you.

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## Short Readings

### From “The Sovereignty of God” by Arthur W. Pink<sup>1</sup>

Who is regulating affairs on this earth today—God, or the Devil? What saith the Scriptures? If we believe their plain and positive declarations, no room is left for uncertainty. They affirm, again and again, that God is on the throne of the universe; that the scepter is in His hands; that He is directing all things “after the counsel of His own will.” They affirm, not only that God created all things, but also that God is ruling and reigning over all the works of His hands. They affirm that God is the “Almighty,” that His will is irreversible, that He is absolute Sovereign in every realm of all His vast dominions. And surely it must be so. Only two alternatives are possible: God must either rule, or be ruled; sway, or be swayed; accomplish His own will, or be thwarted by His creatures. Accepting the fact that He is the “Most High,” the only Potentate and King of kings, vested with perfect wisdom and illimitable power, and the conclusion is irresistible that He must be God in fact as well as in name. Present-day conditions call loudly for a new examination and new presentation of God’s omnipotency, God’s sufficiency, God’s Sovereignty. From every pulpit in the land it needs to be thundered forth that God still lives, that God still observes, that God still reigns. Faith is now in the crucible, it is being tested by fire, and there is no fixed and sufficient resting-place for the heart and mind but in the Throne of God. What is needed now, as never before, is a full, positive, constructive setting forth of the Godhood of God. Drastic diseases call for drastic remedies. People are weary of platitudes and mere generalizations the call is for something definite and specific. Soothing-syrup may serve for peevish children, but an iron tonic is better suited for adults, and we know of nothing which is more calculated to infuse spiritual vigor into our frames than a scriptural apprehension of the full character of God. It is written, “The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits” (Dan. 11: 32). Without a doubt a world-crisis is at hand, and everywhere men are alarmed. But God is not! He is never taken by surprise. It is no unexpected emergency which now confronts Him, for He is the One who “works all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1: 11). Hence, though the world is panic-stricken, the word to the believer is, “Fear not!” “All things” are subject to His immediate control: “all things” are moving in accord with His eternal purpose, and therefore “all things” are “working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” It must be so, for “of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things” (Rom. 11: 36). Yet how little is this realized today even by the people of God! Many suppose that He is little more than a far-distant Spectator, taking no immediate hand in the affairs of earth. It is true that man is endowed with power, but God is all-powerful. It is true that, speaking generally, the material world is regulated by law, but behind that law is the law-Giver and law-Administrator. Man is but the creature. God is the Creator, and endless ages before man first saw the light “the mighty God” (Isa. 9: 6) existed, and ere the world was founded, made His plans; and being infinite in power and man only finite, His purpose and plan cannot be withstood or thwarted by the creatures of His own hands.

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<sup>1</sup> Pink, Arthur Walkington. *The Sovereignty of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965.

# Week 6 Daniel 5

## Pride Before the Fall

*Wail, for the day of the LORD is near;  
as destruction from the Almighty it will come!  
Therefore all hands will be feeble,  
and every human heart will melt.  
They will be dismayed:  
pangs and agony will seize them;  
they will be in anguish like a woman in labor.  
They will look aghast at one another;  
their faces will be aflame.*

**Isaiah 13:6-8**

Daniel 5 is a theological history, much like the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. On the one hand, empires rise and fall through very earthly means. Rebellion, invasion, intrigue, and deception may all play a part in the unfolding drama. On the other hand, a theological history pulls back the curtain to reveal God's plans and his working to fulfill his plans (Dan 2:21–22).

The year is 539 BC. About 30 years have passed between the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. Nebuchadnezzar has died, and through a succession of Babylonian kings, Daniel has been mostly forgotten (cf. Ex 1:8). If Daniel was a teenager when he entered exile in Babylon in 586, he would now be in his sixties.

The “official” Babylonian king is Nabonidus, who reigned from 556–539 BC. Nabonidus entered self-imposed exile in Tema in 550 BC, perhaps the time when he appointed his son, Belshazzar, as co-regent. While Nabonidus has been in Tema and on various military campaigns, Belshazzar has ruled the kingdom from Babylon.

We know from the Nabonidus Chronicle, a cuneiform tablet that is the primary extra-biblical source for this period, that the Persians had taken the nearby city of Sippar just two days before the feast recorded in Daniel 5. To any contemporary observer, the coming fall of Babylon would hardly be surprising. But as a theological history, Daniel 5 reveals that God is at work fulfilling his plans (cf. Isa 13; 21; Jer 50; 51). It is the result of a divine decree of judgment against a blasphemous king, which soon leads to the end of the exile (Isa 44:28; Ezra 1:1–4).

## Week 6 Sermon Notes



## Main Character

**Belshazzar:** Co-regent of Babylonia from around 550 to 539 BC. He administered the kingdom for his father, Nabonidus. Belshazzar means the god “Bel has protected the king.” Aside from Daniel 5 and the Nabonidus Chronicle, little is known of Belshazzar. Given his co-regency and the fall of Babylon in 539 BC, this lack of information is not surprising.

## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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2) Break the passage down into 3-4 sections and give each section a title.

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3) Write down 3-5 observations about the passage. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why questions.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## GROW

What was Belshazzar's sin?

What are similarities between Daniel and Moses with regard to kings and rulers?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## GO

What role do politics play in God's plan for the world?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.

## Discussion Questions

1) How are you feeling regarding the current political climate? Are you afraid, frustrated, angry, hopeful, excited, apathetic, etc.? (Be careful to focus your discussion on your feelings and not on particular political candidates.)

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2) In this section, how does God show His might and power over King Belshazzar?

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3) How might the truth that God rules over the nations affect our thoughts and feelings towards this current election cycle?

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4) In what ways would God want us to walk in faith and obedience to Him during this season? How can your group pray for you in this regard?

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## Short Readings

### From “Institutes of the Christian Religion” (Volumes 1 & 2) by John Calvin<sup>1</sup>

...although either fatherly favor and beneficence or severity of judgment often shine forth in the whole course of providence, nevertheless sometimes the causes of the events are hidden. So the thought creeps in that human affairs turn and whirl at the blind urge of fortune; or the flesh incites us to contradiction, as if God were making sport of men by throwing them about like balls. It is, indeed, true that if we had quiet and composed minds ready to learn, the final outcome would show that God always has the best reason for his plan: either to instruct his own people in patience, or to correct their wicked affections and tame their lust, or to subjugate them to self-denial, or to arouse them from sluggishness; again, to bring low the proud, to shatter the cunning of the impious and to overthrow their devices. Yet however hidden and fugitive from our point of view the causes may be, we must hold that they are surely laid up with him, and hence we must exclaim with David: “Great, O God, are the wondrous deeds that thou hast done, and thy thoughts toward us cannot be reckoned; if I try to speak, they would be more than can be told” [Ps. 40:5].

But we must so cherish moderation that we do not try to make God render account to us, but so reverence his secret judgments as to consider his will the truly just cause of all things. When dense clouds darken the sky, and a violent tempest arises, because a gloomy mist is cast over our eyes, thunder strikes our ears and all our senses are benumbed with fright, everything seems to us to be confused and mixed up; but all the while a constant quiet and serenity ever remain in heaven. So must we infer that, while the disturbances in the world deprive us of judgment, God out of the pure light of his justice and wisdom tempers and directs these very movements in the best-conceived order to a right end.

*For historical background on the events of Daniel see chapter 14 of:*

*Merrill, Eugene H. Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.*

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion Volumes 1 & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 210–212.

# Week 7 Daniel 6

## Longing for Home

*Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.*

**Exodus 1:15-17**

Daniel had been in exile for more than six decades. He knew that in only a few years more, the Jews would be released to return to their homeland (9.1-2; cf. Jeremiah 29.10). Through years of Babylonian prosperity and decline, Daniel had faithfully obeyed God’s command to seek the peace and prosperity of the city (Jer. 29.7). Now the mighty Medo-Persian empire ruled. Its territory would eventually include a vast swath of land from Egypt and modern-day Turkey to northwestern India before it would finally fall to Alexander the Great. The Persians brought stability and improved infrastructure, but they were also renowned for “court intrigues, moral decadence, and unrestrained luxury”.<sup>1</sup> Inflated egos, insatiable hunger for power, indifference toward human life, superstition, and decadent materialism were symptomatic of their ignorance of and disregard for the one true God.

Politics is a messy business. The transition in leadership brought new responsibility—and opportunity for power—for 120 government officials. The king favored Daniel for his excellence and integrity, but Daniel’s pagan colleagues allowed their jealousy to drive them into a homicidal scheme to depose their aged enemy. Daniel’s lifelong faithfulness to God was so consistent that his persecutors were certain they could use his religion as a fail-proof trap. They wielded their power to lobby for an executive decree, the king signed it into law, and after all his years of loyal service, Daniel became the target of government-sanctioned injustice.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art. “The Achaemenid Persian Empire (550-330 B.C.).” In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-- , [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acha/hd\\_acha.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/acha/hd_acha.htm) (October 2004). Accessed 11 July 2016.



## ▶ Week 7 Sermon Notes



## Strangers in a Strange Land

The events recorded in the book of Daniel give us brief glimpses of Daniel's long life as a stranger in a pagan land. His faithfulness to God and God's faithfulness to him in the mundane events of exile undoubtedly prepared him for the more intense conflicts with the pagan culture. Daniel 6 records one experience when Daniel was compelled to risk his life by publically disobeying the governing authority. Like the Hebrew midwives in Egypt before him and the apostles after him, he chose to obey God rather than man (Exodus 1.15-21; Acts 5.17-42). Like his three friends in chapter 3, Daniel didn't know if God would deliver him from the lions (at least the Scripture doesn't indicate that he did), but he knew that God is more powerful than any human edict and giving glory to another was not an option.

What about now? When is a Christian required to commit civil disobedience? When is it not required but permissible? What does it look like? While not prescriptive in every detail, Daniel's civil disobedience exemplifies a peaceful but unyielding resolve to obey God in a way that publically demonstrated the injustice of the law he was breaking. Obeying the law would require him to do something God has commanded his people not to do. Daniel's public disobedience exposed the unjust law's offense, and he accepted the consequences of that disobedience, trusting God for the outcome.

## TREASURE

1) Read through the passage 2-3 times. Summarize what happens in a few brief sentences.

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2) Break the passage down into 3-4 sections and give each section a title.

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3) Write down 3-5 observations about the passage. Start by asking who/what/where/when/why questions.

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4) Write down any questions you have about this passage.

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## GROW

What do verses 10-13 and 21-22 reveal about Daniel's character?

Pick out one key verse that explains the heart of the passage. Ask yourself what verse, if removed, would make the passage hard to understand.

Meditate on that key passage by reading through it slowly and thinking through its meaning. Here are some questions to help in your meditation:

What specific action of obedience is God calling me to this week?

How does this passage affect the way I think about God?

What can I praise God for based on the truths I've learned?

How can I serve others with what I have learned?

## GO

How does Daniel's example inform how we talk about our current cultural climate with non-believing neighbors or co-workers?

Write down an insight or encouragement from this passage that you can use to edify your fellowship group this week.

## Discussion Questions

1) Share a time when you were particularly challenged to trust in God. How did you see more of God during it?

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2) Discuss the temptations that Daniel must have faced as he experienced persecution for his faith. How did he respond to them?

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3) How might God's character and word have been a help to Daniel as he faced the lions' den? Is there a particular verse or characteristic that can serve you today for whatever difficulty you might be enduring?

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4) Talk about the results of God's deliverance of Daniel. How did it impact Daniel, the king, the enemies, the nations, and most importantly, the fame of God? How might this encourage you today?

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## Short Readings

### From “What Is the Relationship Between Church And State?” by R.C. Sproul<sup>1</sup>

#### Civil Obedience

Obedying authority is hard. We bristle anytime we hear someone say: “You must do this. You ought to do that.” We want to be able to say: “Don’t tell me what to do. I want to do what I want to do.” We want people to empower and entitle us. We hate receiving mandates. That’s our nature.

In light of this, I like to talk about a Christian worldview and how it differs from a pagan worldview. One way to differentiate the two would be to consider each worldview’s understanding of responsibility toward authority. If I were not a Christian, I certainly wouldn’t embrace submission to authority. But being a Christian makes me hesitate before I live in active disobedience to those whom God has put in authority over me.

To understand why, we must look at the New Testament’s explanation of the origin and function of government under God. This issue is clearly dealt with by the Apostle Paul in the thirteenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans.

Romans 13 begins: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” (vv. 1–2). Paul begins this study of the government with an Apostolic command for everyone to submit to governing authorities. This lays a framework for Christian civil disobedience.

Paul’s teaching in Romans 13:1–2 is not an isolated instance in the New Testament. Paul is simply reiterating here what he teaches elsewhere, what is also taught by Peter in his epistles—and by our Lord Himself—that there is a fundamental obligation of the Christian to be a model of civil obedience. We as the people of God are called upon to be as obedient as we possibly can in good conscience to the powers that be. Remember that Paul is writing this to people who are under the

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<sup>1</sup> Sproul, R.C. *What Is the Relationship between Church and State?* North Mankato, MN: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2014.

oppression of the Roman government. He's telling people to be submissive to a government that would eventually execute him. But he doesn't do so in a blind sense that precludes any possibility of civil disobedience....

In Acts 1:8, Jesus gave a mandate to His disciples: "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). They were to be witnesses, but witnesses to what? The immediate context of this verse is a discussion about the kingdom. Jesus was going to heaven, but He said, "In my absence you are to bear witness to the transcendent, supernatural truth of my ascension." That's why our first loyalty as Christians must be to our heavenly King. We are called to respect, honor, pray for, and be in subjection to our earthly authorities, but the minute we exalt the earthly authority over the authority of Christ, we have betrayed Him, and we have committed treason against the King of kings. His authority is higher than the authority of the president of the United States or Congress or the king of Spain or any ruler anywhere else....

This obviously raises the question of whether it is ever lawful to rebel against the appointed government. We will consider this question more in chapter six, but for now we should note that we ought to be wary of engaging in unlawful civil disobedience without just cause. Our fallen world is beset by evil, seen especially in lawlessness. The archenemy of the Christian faith is described as the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3). It was lawlessness—the sin of Adam and Eve—that plunged the world into ruin in the first place. They would not submit to the rule and reign of God. This is why I say that sin is a political matter—not in the sense of modern politics, but in the sense that God is the ultimate governor of our lives. Every time I sin, I participate in the revolt against God's perfect rule. Paul continues in Romans 13, "Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has "appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (v. 2). Paul is obviously talking about unlawful resistance against the powers that be. In the Old Testament account of the struggle between Saul and David, we see David as a man who didn't want to unlawfully resist God's authority structures. He had many opportunities to kill Saul, but he refused to lift his hand against him. As evil as Saul was, David knew that he was God's anointed king....

## **Civil Disobedience**

Is there ever a time when it is legitimate for the church or the Christian to act in defiance toward the state? This has been a highly controversial matter since the founding of the United States. Many Christians were divided on whether it was legitimate to declare independence from the crown of England. The issues are rather complex, and there is much disagreement among Christian theologians and ethicists when it comes to civil disobedience.

When Paul wrote, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1), he was writing to people who were suffering under the oppression of the Roman government. Yet, Paul taught the believers in Rome to be good subjects of the empire, to pay their taxes, to give honor to the authorities over them, and to pray regularly for those who were in positions of power and authority (v. 7).

The Westminster Confession of Faith says, “It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to honor their persons, to pay them tribute or other dues, to obey their lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience’ sake. Infidelity, or difference in religion, does not make void the magistrates’ just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them” (23.4). This means that if the state is irreligious and differs from us in terms of our religious convictions, we are not freed from our responsibility to honor it as the government. We continue to pray for our government officials and pay taxes. This is our calling, even if we disagree with how we are taxed and how tax revenue is spent by the government.

Therefore, the first principle is civil obedience. The principle of civil obedience is that we are called to be in submission to authorities ruling over us—and not only when we agree with them. Indeed, Christians are called to be model citizens....

Does that mean we must always obey? Absolutely not. There are times when Christians are free to disobey the magistrate, but there are also times when we must disobey the civil magistrate....

Whom do you obey when there is a direct, immediate, and unequivocal conflict between the law of God and the rule of men? At times, human rulers require people to do things that God forbids, or forbids them from doing what God commands. The principle is very simple. If any ruler—a governing official or body, school teacher, boss, or military commander—commands you to do something God forbids or forbids you from doing something God commands, not only may you disobey, but you must disobey. If it comes down to a choice like this, you must obey God.

You can memorize this principle in a few moments, but the application can be exceedingly complex. As sinful people, we must realize that we are very prone to twist and distort things in our favor in order to benefit ourselves. Before we disobey the authorities over us, we should be sure to be painfully self-reflective and have a clear understanding as to why we plan to disobey.



If my boss told me to cook the books so that he could be protected from the charge of embezzlement, I would have to disobey. If a governmental authority told you that you had to have an abortion, you would have to disobey because you obey a higher authority. If the authorities say we're not allowed to distribute Bibles or preach the Word of God, we have to do it anyway because we have a mandate from Christ to disciple the nations....

While the principle of conscience has eroded in our government, acts of civil disobedience have remained. This was demonstrated in the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, when large groups of oppressed people transgressed local statutes. This movement sought to make it plain that local laws were unjust and violated the Constitution of the United States.

Because the matter of civil disobedience is complicated, it's vitally important that we master the basic principles regarding the relationship between church and state. As Paul says in Romans 13, we are to be subject to the authorities that are placed over us, because their power is a derivative power, given to them by God Himself. This is the principle of civil obedience. But when those authorities command us to do something God forbids or forbid us from doing something God commands, we must obey God rather than earthly authorities.

God has established two realms on earth: the church and the state. Each one has its own sphere of authority, and neither is to infringe on the rights of the other. And as Christians, we are to show great respect and concern for them both.

A very special thanks to our pastors and elders for their leadership and all who contributed to the content and production of this booklet

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