

# 1. Daring to be different

## Passage – Daniel 1:1-21

ISIS- Palmyra – Babylon – first century

If walk South-east from Palmyra to Baghdad and then go 80km south ruins of another great city on the Euphrates River

Founded in Genesis 10 – Babel where God confused the world's languages

Why study what happened in Babylon 2,600 years ago?

Very similar society to the one we now live in

Anyone observing political events in the western world today would be clear that we are now living in a post-Christian society and working in a post-Christian health service.

The mountains of our culture – those institutions which shape its cultural trajectory – parliament, the judiciary, the universities, schools, the worlds of media and entertainment - are now increasingly occupied by people who hold to an atheistic world view and the values of secular humanism.

'God doesn't exist. Man is a clever monkey. Death is the end. Morality is discovered not revealed.' The sacred triad of autonomy – 'I want it' – technology – 'we can do it' – and moral relativism – 'why not' – are increasingly determining the moral direction of Western countries including New Zealand.

Same sex marriage, abortion on demand, the relentless push for legalised euthanasia, materialism, crippling debt and self-absorption are merely symptoms of a collective loss of Christian faith.

So how are we to live in a society which has lost its cultural foundations and is now increasingly inimical to both Christian faith and values?

How are we to live when we find ourselves increasingly as 'aliens and strangers' in our own country? Because that is what the Apostle Peter tells us that Christians are – aliens and strangers in a world hostile to Christian faith and values (1 Peter 1:1 and 2:11)

It's precisely for this kind of situation that the story of Daniel is so instructive.

When Paul instructed Timothy (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) that 'all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' he was talking about the Old Testament – as the New Testament at that stage had not been compiled.

As the same apostle says to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 10:11), 'These things (in the OT) happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.'

### A journey in history

So let me take you back 2,600 years in history.

When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC, the nation of Judah was taken to Babylon in an exile that would last 70 years. As God's people in a foreign land that was hostile to their faith and values, they faced the challenge of living and serving as 'aliens and strangers'. There was great pressure to close ranks or to forget who they were. There was also great handwringing and lament.

Their emotions are beautifully described in Psalm 137, in words given popular currency by the pop band Boney M – a German based but ethnically Jamaican foursome – who achieved popularity during the disco era of the late 1970s.

In King James English:

*'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.'*(Psalm 137:1)

The psalm goes on to describe in graphic detail how they were tormented by their captors, unable to sing the songs of their homeland, pining for Jerusalem and longing for vengeance against those who had mistreated them.

The Old Testament Scriptures left them in no doubt either about why it had happened

The book of Deuteronomy had been very clear

*'But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.... And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.'*(Deuteronomy 28:15, 64)

And the prophets had repeatedly warned that they would end up in exile if they didn't turn from their sin

They were forcibly displaced people - not even asylum seekers or refugees let alone economic migrants - but rather captives – prisoners of war in a country utterly different from their own in language, culture, values, religion and worldview.

God's people – but made to serve in an evil empire, Babylon.

In the New Testament the symbolism of 'Babylon' is used by the apostles to describe Christian's position in the world.

The apostle Peter talks of 'living in Babylon' and describes God's elect (Christians) as 'strangers in the world' (1 Peter 1:1), and 'aliens' (1 Peter 2:11).

We are called to 'be holy' – to be set apart – because we are 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood' and 'a holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9).

### **Overview of Daniel**

One of the key themes of the book of Daniel is that God is sovereign over all physical, spiritual, social and political processes (Daniel 2:21, 4:17, 5:21). He is absolutely in control.

In other words, fire can't burn, lions can't bite and kings can't rule unless God allows them to.

God's rescue of Daniel from the lion's den in Daniel 6 and of his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace in Daniel 3 are familiar to anyone who has attended Sunday school.

But less appreciated and believed in – even in the church - is God's control over political events and his sovereign rule over the rise and fall of nations.

Daniel 2:21 – 'He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others.'

Daniel 4:32 – 'The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes' – repeated in 4:17, 25; 5:21, 35

Two great visions/dreams – in chapters 2 and 7 of this book – illustrate this.

First there is the great statue in chapter 2 with its head of gold, chest of silver, loins of bronze and legs of iron – representing the empire of Babylon and three more empires – usually identified by commentators as Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome - which will follow it.

Then there are the four great beasts of chapter 7 – representing probably the same four kingdoms – each falling to be replaced by the next.

Each dream ends in a similar way with these temporary earthly Kingdoms being destroyed to be replaced by a heavenly kingdom that will never end.

The statue made from four metals is smashed by a rock which grows to fill the whole world – a direct reference to Christ's Kingdom.

The four beasts are superseded by one, we are told, like a 'Son of Man' (Daniel 7:13) coming with the clouds of heaven. He approaches the Ancient of Days (God the father) and is led into his presence.

Then this Son of man 'is given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worship(ed) him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.'

'Son of Man' was of course Jesus' favourite term for himself. It is Jesus who through his death and resurrection rules over all the kingdoms of men.

I live in St Albans – named after Britain's first Christian martyr, a Roman nobleman called Alban - who was converted through the ministry of a priest fleeing persecution in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. When he refused to recant the Roman officials chopped his head off.

But centuries later when the Roman town of Verulamium where he lived lay in ruins they took the bricks and used them to build a cathedral on the very spot where he had given his life.

It's a beautiful picture of what has, and is, happening in history – through the shedding of Jesus own blood at the hands of Roman Empire – God is building a living temple of his own people – the church.

Daniel 7:27 – ‘the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.’

Of course what is true of the ancient world empires is equally true of the empires of today – the American, British and Soviet Empires – and equally the Empires of post-war western capitalism and Islam.

God has raised them all up and he will bring them all down.

God is not only sovereign over his own people. Yes he brought the nation of Israel out of captivity in Egypt and planted them in the Promised Land.

But, as the prophet Amos tells us (9:7) he also brought up the Philistines from Caphtor – Crete - and the Arameans from Kir. Every migration is ultimately God’s doing.

As the apostle Paul reminds us:

*‘From one man (God) made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.’ (Acts 17:26)*

God is sovereign over all *political* events – just as he is sovereign over *all events* of any kind. Even over the health service.

In like manner the Jews did not end up in Babylon by some mistake or historical accident – and certainly not by the design of Babylon itself. God himself put them there:

*Daniel 1:1-2 - ‘In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And **the Lord delivered** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.’*

That’s how Daniel and his friends got to Babylon in the first place.

By 605 BC when book of Daniel starts – Babylon was the most powerful city in the world

It was the capital city of the Babylonian empire – Egypt to Armenia, Turkey to Iran

Babylon ruled all the nations rather like Moscow ruled USSR: 100,000 people, 1,197 temples, home of the hanging gardens of Babylon – the Ishtar gate reconstructed in Berlin’s Pergamon Museum.

A world leader in science, art, astronomy, literature, engineering – and pre-eminent in political and military strength - Judah was just one of many nations crushed.

But in fact Babylon’s rule over the known world was also to be rather short-lived.

The Prophet Isaiah had already foretold its destruction by the Medes in Isaiah 13 & 14.

And the prophet Jeremiah was about to describe in graphic detail how it was to be removed from the pages of history and never rebuilt in Jeremiah 50 & 51

In fact this extraordinary city and Empire was only to last at its height for 70 years – ironically almost exactly the same period of time that the Soviet Union lasted.

Remember that our story started in 605 BC with the taking off of King Jehoiakim and exiles including Daniel and his friends to Babylon.

### **Relevant History**

The very next year one of the most decisive battles in the history of the ancient world was to be fought – the battle of Carchemish.

You may remember that King Josiah of Judah was killed trying at Megiddo to stop King Neco of Egypt going to Carchemish to fight this battle – maybe a poignant warning to us that we should pick our battles and not try to separate giants.

But at Carchemish the Babylonian army routed a combined force made of Egyptians and Assyrians and so Babylon took over from Assyria and Egypt as the dominant world power.

Both these empires had already played a massive part in the history of the nation of Israel.

The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years until they were led out in the Exodus under Moses.

They had then taken the Promised Land under Joshua and survived through the period of the Judges and the early monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon.

During the time of Solomon's son Rehoboam, the Kingdom was split into two – the ten Northern tribes coalesced into a Northern Kingdom called Israel or Ephraim.

And the tribes of Judah and Levi – the tribe of the priesthood - making up the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians in 720 BC and the ten tribes were subsequently lost to the pages of history.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah lasted for another 130 years until it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC.

After the exile in Babylon the Jews (as the descendants of the tribe of Judah were then known) returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

### **History of Empires**

- 605 BC - Daniel and his friends taken to Babylon
- 604 BC - Battle of Carchemish
- 587 BC - Babylonians sack Jerusalem
- 539 BC - Medo-Persians sack Babylon
- 480 BC - Battle of Salamis – Greeks defeat Persians
- 334 BC – Alexander the Great destroys Persia

### **The Book of Daniel**

Begins in Hebrew – switches to Aramaic from 2:4 to 7:268 then switches back to Aramaic

## **Twelve chapters**

First six are narrative stories

- 1 The King's diet
- 2 Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue
- 3 The Fiery furnace
- 4 Vision of tree and Nebuchadnezzar's psychosis
- 5 Belshazzar's banquet
- 6 Daniel in the lions' den

Second six are visions

- 7 The four beasts and the Son of Man
- 8 The ram and the goat
- 9 Daniel's prayer and Gabriel's visit
- 10 Daniel's vision of the Man
- 11 Detailed prophecy of the Greeks
- 12 The End of World history

Timing of Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC) – Chapters 1-4

Belshazzar (550-539 BC) – Chapters 5, 7 and 8

Darius the Mede (started 538 BC) – Chapters 6 and 9

Cyrus (538-522 BC) – Chapters 10-12

## **Similarities**

The situation which Daniel and his three friends faced has many similarities with ours as Christian doctors and medical students

We read in Daniel 1:3-7 that Daniel and his friends were:

- selected for a period of rigorous training
  - o Six years and then postgraduate training
- taken apart from home and family
  - o Many of us study away from home and our jobs are rigorous
- had to acquire new language and skills – language and literature of Babylonians
  - o Medical language and skills
- employed by the state in a privileged position
  - o Most of us work for the government and highly honoured (pay/prestige)
- faced pressures to conform to the society in which they had been placed
  - o Many temptations – money, sex and power
- given new godlike names
  - o God like names – Bel, Nebo, Aku

They were in many ways model citizens who had a huge respect for the authorities and hierarchical structures they had been asked to serve. But they were actually citizens of another Kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

In Babylon they were aliens, exiles, sojourners, strangers – awaiting the coming of their real Kingdom when they would return to Jerusalem – just as we are waiting to be taken to our New Jerusalem with Christ.

So as God's people they had to live in a time of tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet'. Just as we do as God's people today

### **Challenges of atheism**

Creation

- *the product of matter, chance and time*

Humanity

- *A higher animal*

Redemption

- *Science and technology*

Future hope

- *Immortality through science and technology*

*Four secular virtues*

Personal peace says 'I want it'

Autonomy says 'I can choose it'

Technology says 'We can do it'

Relativism says 'Why not?'

God's kingdom has been inaugurated but will not fully come until Christ returns in judgment. Christians are therefore called both to be 'in the world' whilst not being 'of the world' (John 17:11, 15-16). We do not 'belong to the world' but have been 'chosen...out of the world' (John 15:18-19).

This world is not our real home – we are citizens of the different Kingdom serving different King

### **The King's diet**

- for with privilege and power come temptations
- Ch 1 – the king's rich food – decided couldn't eat – not told why - ? not kosher, offered to idols, rich
- You may face pressure to do things that would be wrong for you as a disciple of Jesus Christ
  - o alcohol and drugs
  - o gossip – talking about people or just being silent – harming reputations
  - o foul language
  - o financial reward – the dermatology registrars
  - o getting experience – the urology list (two indications for surgery)
  - o fame
  - o corruption and taking bribes – huge abroad – chronic remunerative appendicitis
  - o sex
  - o lying to patients

- subtle little denials of Christ – relativism

### **Works of the flesh**

‘But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.... Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.’ (ESV) (Galatians 5:19-21)

### **Putting on and putting off**

‘Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.... But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.’ (Colossians 3:5-10)

- Matthew 6:8 - Do not be like them’ Mt 6:8
- Romans 12:1,2 – Don’t let the world press you into its mould

Knowing the pitfalls story (if time)

- Know the pitfalls
- Walk in the light
- Don’t get separated from the flock

Porcupine story if time (cut and paste) (if time)

Kenyan pastor Calisto Odede preached on Ephesians 4:17-6:9 at Cape Town 2010: the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation on 16-25 October.

His final illustration was an amusing but salutary cautionary tale from Africa.

*In a certain country the law says you should not eat porcupines.*

*An individual was found hunting a porcupine  
He was asked ‘Do you know what the law says?’  
And he said ‘The law says “you are not to eat a porcupine”.  
It does not say “don’t hunt a porcupine”.’*

*He was found carrying a porcupine.  
He was asked ‘Do you know what the law says?’  
And he said ‘The law says “you are not to eat a porcupine”.  
It does not say “don’t carry a porcupine”.’*

*He was found skinning a porcupine.*

*He was asked 'Do you know what the law says?'  
And he said 'The law says "you are not to eat a porcupine".  
It does not say "don't skin a porcupine".'*

*He was found roasting a porcupine.  
And he was asked 'Do you know what the law says?'  
And he said 'The law says "you are not to eat a porcupine".  
It does not say "don't roast a porcupine".'*

*He was found tasting a porcupine.  
And he was asked 'Do you know what the law says?'  
And he said 'The law says "you are not to eat a porcupine".  
It does not say "don't taste a porcupine".'*

*Unfortunately he tasted the whole porcupine.*

*There are some of you, said Odede, who have tasted the whole porcupine. It started out as something small you thought you could control but it has now taken over your whole life and you need to bring it before the Lord.*

*Don't eat the King's diet*

King's chariot driver if time (if time)

### **How should we react?**

- a. Decide where you stand – big push for reading and study etc
- b. Resolve to stand there – always hardest the first time
- c. Involve your friends
- d. Seek permission ahead of time
- e. Suggest alternatives – controlled trial – not randomised and double blind!
- f. Count the cost ?embarrassment – bite the bullet – hardest the first time

Result? God blessed them and gave them opportunity to witness to their faith  
Prospered them in their work  
Not a guarantee that these things will happen  
Costs got greater – look at Ch 3 and chapter 6

### **Conclusion**

Understand the background  
See that God is in control  
Know the temptations  
Don't eat the king's diet