

**Theme:** One Story (Acts 17:26-28)

**Title:** “Living in Exile” – Daniel 1:1-21

**Aim:** How do we live as believers in the exile of this world?

**Intro:** During this now 7 month pandemic, many may feel they are in exile, cut off from their “normal” world & especially from loved ones/friends. Some of you are not here in person today & haven’t been since it all started, because of the pandemic (thankful for technology – you can participate via live stream). But in reality, exile is not unusual, but rather the norm for the follower of Christ. The writer of Hebrews said of Noah & Abraham & others that “they were strangers & exiles on the earth...seeking a homeland” (11:13-14). Peter called his readers “sojourners & exiles” (I Peter 2:11). As Christians, we have dual citizenship. We may be citizens of the USA or another nation of this world, but also, as Paul wrote in Philippians 3:20, “Our citizenship is in heaven...” This world is not our home, really. We belong to the family & the kingdom of God. Our king is Jesus. So, how do we live as exiles in this world we are to be in but not of? Scripture tells us how to live, & a great example is Daniel, one of the 1<sup>st</sup> exiles taken to Babylon in 605 BC. Theme: One story – one God, one plan, one story – the story of God’s redeeming grace. Our text is essentially Daniel 1-9, but don’t be afraid – we’ll just look at Daniel’s example in this vast store of truth. Daniel 1:1-21 [READ]. As said, Daniel was among the exiles taken to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar’s 1<sup>st</sup> attack on Jerusalem/Judah in 605 BC, when he had taken members of the royal family, nobles & wise men. Walter Kaiser wrote, that Daniel was “born into an unidentified family of nobility sometime just prior to Josiah’s reformation in 622 BC.” Daniel & other young men from Judah, including Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego), were entered into a 3 year course of study of Babylonian literature, language & culture, in order that they might be put into King Nebuchadnezzar’s service. It’s in this chapter 1

that we learn the 1<sup>st</sup> & foundational example of how to live in exile.

I) **Fear God & resolve to stay true to Him**. Daniel (& his 3 friends) had plenty of reason to be afraid of their captors. They had most likely seen people all around them be killed in the Babylonian attack against Jerusalem. They were now captives in a foreign land. Everything had changed. They were used to royal treatment in some fashion; now they were being told how to live & what to think. I'm sure that most of the captives simply went along w/the program, but Daniel, while complying w/all he could, realized that the king's supply of food & drink (sure it was the finest quality) was not "kosher" – not in keeping w/dietary restrictions of the Jews, under Mosaic Law. He "resolved that he would not defile himself." It's imp to note what he did about it. He went to the one in authority over him & appealed to him to "allow him not to defile himself" w/the food & drink. "Just try it out for 10 days. Give us (his 3 friends stood w/him) vegetables to eat & water to drink & see how we fare." The guy agreed & after 10 days they were in better shape than the rest. So they were allowed to continue, for the full 3 years, w/their special diet, & God gave them favor. After the 3 yrs were up, Nebuchadnezzar found that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah were 10 times better in every way than any others in his kingdom. The point is not the diet, but their resolve to stay true to God because they feared/revered & respected Him above all others. As we live in this world as exiles, the fear of the Lord & our love for Him & commitment to Him should have top priority & guide all we do. II) **Depend upon God & follow His lead** (Chap.2). A yr later, so mind you, Daniel was only in his 2<sup>nd</sup> yr of Babylonian education, King Nebuchadnezzar had dreams – nightmares, really, because they troubled his spirit & he couldn't sleep afterwards. The king called for all his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers & Chaldeans (wise men/ counselors) to come before him & 1<sup>st</sup> tell him what the dream was &

then what it meant. Of course, none of them could do so, to which the king said, "Ok, if you can't do it, why do I have you around? I order you all to be killed." The larger grouping would include those being trained, such as Daniel & his friends. "So the decree went out, & the wise men were about to be killed." They sought out Daniel & all the young men in training. "Daniel replied w/prudence & discretion" to the "captain of the king's guard" & asked that the king give him opportunity to meet w/him so "that he might show the interpretation to the king" (2:16), & it was granted. Then Daniel beat feet home & told his friends the situation & "told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery" (vs18). "Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision" (vs19). Then Daniel thanked & praised God (which we should always do) & went w/confidence in God before the king.

III) **Exalt God & represent Him before others** (Chap2). When Daniel came before the king, he didn't puff himself up, but when the king asked him if he was able to tell him the dream & give the interpretation, he humbly said, no man can do such a thing, "but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, & He has revealed to [you] what will be in the latter days" (vs27-28). Then he proceeded to tell Nebuchadnezzar the dream he had, of a great statue, w/a head of gold, chest & arms of silver, middle & thighs of bronze, legs of iron & feet of a mixture of iron & clay. Then he told the interpretation of the dream, of 4 great world empires, beginning w/Babylon, then Medo-Persian, Greek & Roman, then a divided kingdom. In the days of those kings, God would set up "a kingdom that will never be destroyed," His eternal kingdom, the beginnings of which was established by Christ when He came, the fullness of which will be seen when He comes again. Have to tune in Wed. night for our live stream Bible study to hear more about that. But Daniel, this very young man at the time, exalted God before Nebuchadnezzar & represented Him before the king. You & I are called

to exalt God & represent Him in all we do, wherever we are. We are ambassadors for Christ – that is our 1<sup>st</sup> duty – to know Him & make Him known. IV) **Speak the truth in love** (Chap4-5). Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, this time about a strong, tall, fruitful tree. It was commanded by “a holy one” to be chopped down & limbed & striped, but the stump intact. Then the narrative became about a person – “let him be wet w/dew, his portion be w/the beasts, his mind be changed from a man’s to a beast, for 7 periods” (yrs). The king asked Daniel to interpret the dream, but he didn’t want to, because he was a servant of the king & was concerned for him (as we should be for those around us), but he told him. “This is you. You are great, but you are proud, & God will bring you to your knees. You shall go mad & for 7 yrs you will be like an animal. King, hear my counsel. Humble yourself before God.” The king didn’t & it happened just as Daniel had said. The king became like an ox, ate grass, his hair & nails grew long, until God brought him to his senses & he exalted God & was re-established as king. Daniel didn’t back down, but courageously spoke the truth in love, as we must, no matter to whom or what the consequences. Again, in Daniel 5, after Nebuchadnezzar was dead & gone, his grandson Belshazzar, was ruling as crown prince while his father Nabonidus was away on a military campaign in Arabia. Belshazzar was an unruly partier who “made a great feast for 1000 of his lords...” (1). He brought vessels of gold & silver taken from the temple in Jerusalem, to drink from them, mocking God. It was then he saw a hand appear out of nowhere & write on the wall. Belshazzar was unglued. Daniel was brought in to interpret, which he did, as God enabled. Again, it wasn’t a pleasant message. Who knows, maybe Belshazzar would get angry & have Daniel killed. But he again courageously spoke the truth, not so much out of respect for Belshazzar, but for God. He said, “Your grandfather exalted himself, too, & was brought low until he came to his senses & acknowledged

God. You should have learned from his example.” The words were “Mene, mene, tekem, & parsin.” Mene = numbered – “Your days are numbered.” Tekem = weighed. “You have been weighed in the balance & found wanting.” Parsin = divided. “Your kingdom is divided & given to the Medes & Persians.” That very night Babylon was overthrown by Darius the Mede & Belshazzar was killed. V) **Remain steadfast, w/integrity** (Chap6). You know the story. Daniel was promoted by Darius to essentially be 2<sup>nd</sup> in command, setting “him over the whole kingdom” (vs3). Other officials didn’t like this & determined to find grounds to make a complaint about Daniel. They couldn’t find any area of wrongdoing, “because he was faithful, & no error or fault was found in him” (would that that were true of our elected officials!). So they decided on a scheme that would find him at “fault” in regard to his faith. They drafted an edict & persuaded the king to sign it (says something about him) that said that for the next 30 days anyone caught praying to any god or man except the king would be thrown into the lions’ den. Daniel heard of this & then proceeded to do exactly as he had done 3 times a day every day since he had been in Babylon – he went home & opened window toward Jerusalem & “prayed & gave thanks before his God.” Again, you know the story. Daniel was caught, thrown into the lions’ den, but God protected him, & the next morning he was brought out & King Darius exalted God. Daniel was a man of integrity & he was steadfast in his walk w/God. That’s how we live in exile: fear God & resolve to stay true to Him; depend on/trust in God & follow His lead; exalt God & represent Him before others; speak the truth in love; & remain steadfast in your faith, w/integrity. Daniel’s story should & can be our story. One story – God’s story. One God, one plan, one story.

