

May 13th, 2018

Christ Centered Captivity

Daniel 1:1-2

The strangeness of Christianity

How strange we Christians must appear to our American culture. This morning we are opening the very ancient book of Daniel, which begins its story in 605 b.c. The people of Judah has been defeated by the world power Babylon, in a far away place that most of us will never travel to. They spoke a language we can't speak, they worshipped gods that exist today only on Wikipedia, and their day to day lives were stripped of the basic technology and conveniences that we have today. They lived in an alien world, and an alien time.

But additionally, we are faced with all these fantastical stories. Young men thrown into a fiery furnace only to be saved by this mysterious ghostly figure. A king who goes insane, becoming like a wild beast with long hair and gnarly fingernails, driven away from all society, who then after a time, regains his sanity and claims the thrown again. A bureaucrat—Daniel who is thrown into a den of lions because he was found praying to God, only to discover the lions are fasting that night. Floating hands that write messages on walls.

And then there are the apocalyptic visions. Goats with multiple horns, lions with eagle wings, beasts with four heads. Visions so “colorful, dramatic, and sometimes grotesque”¹ that even Daniel failed understand the things he was seeing (12:8). How then can we possibly understand these things?

The world is also infatuated

What a strange sight Christians must be indeed. But then again, billions of dollars are spent every year on movies that feature talking raccoons, green women, and gods that can shoot lightning out of their hands. The world seems to be as infatuated with such fantastical stories as the Bible is.

¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher's Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 16

No. I don't think the problem is all the fantastic things that we see in the book of Daniel. Human beings are naturally drawn to these other worldly images and stories, because we all instinctively know that there is an other worldly reality. All human beings long for something deeper than this world provides. J.R. Tolkien understood this well. He had a famous essay entitled "On Fairy Stories" in which he argues "that there are indelible, deep longings in the human heart that realistic fiction cannot satisfy. Fantasy fiction—fairy tales and science fiction...depict characters who:

- get outside of time altogether;
- escape death;
- hold communion with nonhuman beings;
- find a perfect love from which they never part;
- triumph finally over evil.²

Tim Keller points out that "these stories resonate so deeply because they bear witness to an underlying reality...We are so deeply interested in these stories because we have intuitions of the creation/fall/redemption/glory plotline of the Bible."³

The real problem

Therefore, the problem with the book of Daniel is not all the fantastical stories that we find in it. The problem is, that all these fantastical stories are true. There is only one Living God, who can stop the mouths of lions and who can quench the power of fire (**Heb. 11:33-34**). This God holds the sanity of all

²Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York, NY,: Viking, 2015), pg. 175

³ *ibid*, pg. 176 Furthermore, Keller points out that "The English word "gospel" comes from the Middle English word *Godspell* which derives from two Old English words: good and spell (story). In Old English "to tell a story" was "to cast a spell." Stories capture the heart and imagination and give us deep joy. The gospel of Jesus Christ is *the Goodspell*. It is *the* story that all other joy-bringing, spell-casting, heart-shaping stories only point to. What's so special about this one? It is the one story that satisfies all these longings—yet is historically *true*."

men in the palm of His hand. All kingdoms rise and fall not because of armies, or tanks, or bullets, or bombs, but *only* because of His say so. He predestines the future of every nation and every individual, *not because* He can simply foresee these futures, but because He plans them. **Daniel 4:34-35** “for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”⁴

That’s the problem with the book of Daniel, is that we are confronted with this Sovereign God with whom we must give an account.⁵ Judah went into captivity because they ignored this God. This God will not be ignored, not in Judah’s life, not in Nebuchadnezzar’s life, not in your life. Humanity will either bow before this God, or they will burn. There is no other option. Daniel’s message is that the Lord God is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and that He will not share the glory due His name with anyone. But that’s *the* problem with humanity. We are glory whores. If human history has proved anything, it has proved that we will worship anyone except this God.

Christ Centered Captivity

That’s why book of Daniel is good news. Daniel isn’t a book about how God annihilates His own people because they have have forsaken Him. Daniel is a promise of how God will forsake His own Son so that He will accept His people. Jesus Christ is the storyline of the whole Bible. And this isn’t some alien interpretation of Daniel—trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. This is how Jesus tells us to interpret Daniel. He told His disciples after His resurrection “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the

⁴ Isaiah 37:26 “Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass,”

⁵ Hebrews 4:13 “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Prophets (this would include Daniel) and the Psalms must be fulfilled”⁶ (Luke 24:44). Therefore, this captivity is a Christ centered captivity.

☆ The Gladness God Requires

☆ The Gloom God Threatened

☆ The Gospel God Planned

The Big Idea...

The book of Daniel tells the story of the exile and separation of God’s people in order to tell the greater story of the exile and separation of God’s Son

I. The Gladness God Requires

We need a storyline

Look with me at v.1 “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” How do we make sense of this? It’s been said that “people cannot make sense of anything without attaching it to a storyline.”⁷ So what’s the story behind these two cities that we see here — Jerusalem and Babylon? Why were they fighting?

The storyline of the Bible

This age-old conflict goes all the way back to **Genesis 3**, at the fall of mankind. God told the serpent after the fall, that there would be perpetual

⁶ “For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else but an expounding of Moses and the prophets; and Jesus Christ is the foundation whereupon the doctrine of Moses and the prophets is [built], —he is the end of the law; all tends to him.” Robert Rollock Source: [http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Rollock,%20Robert/Selected%20Works%20of%20Robert%20Rollock%20\(vol.2\).pdf](http://www.digitalpuritan.net/Digital%20Puritan%20Resources/Rollock,%20Robert/Selected%20Works%20of%20Robert%20Rollock%20(vol.2).pdf) accessed May 12, 2018 40th Lecture, pg. 478

⁷ Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Word to God’s Work*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 155

warfare between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the women (**Gen. 3:15**). The cities of Jerusalem and Babylon are not so much geographical locations, but are rather representations of the seed of the woman (Jerusalem) and the seed of the serpent (Babylon). As Sinclair Ferguson says “Babylon and Jerusalem represent the two cities to which [all] men and women belong.”⁸ You either belong to Babylon—the city of man that opposes God’s Kingdom, or you belong to Jerusalem—the city of God. This is the true division in all of humanity.

Babylon is born

However, there was and is a physical Jerusalem and even a physical Babylon. [Please turn to **Genesis 11**] It’s here where we get our first glimpse of Babylon. The Earth’s rebels are disobeying God’s mandate to fill the earth and subdue it. They gather in the land of Shinar—**v.2** (the same place Nebuchadnezzar brings the captives back to in **Daniel 1:2**) and they build a tower in order to bring glory to themselves. God won’t have it, so He confuses their language. **Genesis 11:9** says “Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth.” Babel is where we get the word Babylon. Babylon—the city of man—is the city of confusion, the city of destruction. And it is this city, not so much physical Babylon, but spiritual Babylon that is the enemy of God and his people. “We should never forget,” Ferguson says, “that this is the meaning of history on both the cosmic and personal scales. A spiritual conflict lies at the heart of every event, however great, however mundane.”⁹

Jerusalem is born

It’s out of this Babylon that God calls Abraham, the Father of Israel. Look at **Genesis 12:1-3** “Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country

⁸ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 26

⁹ *ibid*

and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you *all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" How would all the families of the earth be blessed through this new nation? Because it is through Israel that Jesus Christ would come into the world. The Apostle Paul says in **Galatians 3:16** tells us why "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ."¹⁰ Israel came into existence *mainly*, so that Jesus Christ would come into the world.

The book of Genesis tells us of the development of the nation of Israel. Abraham's grandson Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel, had 12 sons which became the 12 tribes of Israel. During Jacob's time, there was a great famine so his entire family moved to Egypt for food. It was there they became slaves for four hundred years (**Genesis 15:13**).¹¹ Enter the book of Exodus. God raised up Moses and through Him displayed that it was the LORD not Pharaoh who was the superpower of the world. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 26:8** "And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders." And thus the nation of Israel established it's own identity. The first five books of the Bible tell of it's birth, development, and the laws that God required them to obey.

Then we have the books of Joshua and Judges where Israel comes into possession of the land that God promised Abraham. Then we have the development of the monarchy in 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. King David is crowned king over all the tribes in the city of Jerusalem. The city of God is most fully realized on Earth under his reign. But soon after David's reign, the

¹⁰ This is why Paul can say that the gospel was preached to Abraham. Galatians 3:8 "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

¹¹ Source: <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/how-long-were-the-israelites-in-egypt/> accessed May 12, 2018

kingdom was split into two—Israel composed of 10 tribes to the North, and Judah composed of 2 tribes to the South. The books of 1 Kings, 2 Kings, and the Chronicles give us a complete record of all the kings of Israel and Judah.

“God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy”¹²

So as we look at **Daniel 1:1** we find Jerusalem—the city of God, coming under the rebels of Babylon—the city of man. The question is: how did it come to this? Why would God allow this to happen to His people?

To answer that, please turn with me to **Deuteronomy 28**. This is the part of the law where God lays out the blessings and curses of the covenant that God made with Israel. Looking at the chapter as a whole we see the blessings for obedience in **v.1-14**, and the curses for disobedience in **v.15-68**.

Look at **v.47** “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with *joyfulness* and *gladness of heart*, because of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything.” With great insight, Jeremy Taylor says about this verse “God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy.”

What does God want from you? He want you to be glad in God. God doesn’t need your service. **Acts 17:24-25** says “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he *served* by human hands, *as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” God needs nothing from us. He didn’t create the world because there was something lacking in Him.

God made the world in order to celebrate God

God made you in order to celebrate God

God made ice cream, and music, and the oceans, and sex, and cities, and galaxies in order to celebrate God.

¹² Jeremy Taylor, quoted in John Piper’s *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO,.; Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 9

God made everything under the sun, so that you would be glad in Him. This is why Jerusalem fell, because they refused to be glad in God. Gladness in God is not an optional part of the Christian life. Gladness in God is not merely a by-product of obedience. Gladness in God is the very essence of obedience that God requires.¹³

You must kiss Me, but not that kind of must

You *must* be glad in God. Edward John Carnell put it like this.

“Suppose a husband asks a wife if he *must* kiss her good night. Her answer is, “You *must*, but not that kind of must.” What she means is this: “Unless a spontaneous affection for my person motivates you, your [advances] are stripped of all moral value.”¹⁴

A husband who goes through the motions of kissing his wife, without being glad in his wife does not honor his wife. That’s what was happening in Jerusalem. They were going through all the motions of external worship. They were observing the feast days, they were observing the sacrifices. They looked very much like a conservative American evangelical today. Basically moral. Basically religious. But they were not glad in God. This was indictment that God pronounced against Israel through all the prophets in the OT “this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (**Isaiah 29:13**).

Are you glad in God?

Dear congregation, are you glad in God? Do you “Delight yourself in the Lord?” (**Psalms 37:4**) Do you “Rejoice in the Lord *always*?” (**Phil. 4:4**) Do you

¹³ The type of obedience that God requires is not *mere* outward duty, it’s inward delight. “Delight yourself in the Lord!” (Psalm 37:4) “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice!” (Psalm 32:11).

¹⁴ Edward John Carnell quoted in John Piper’s *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 93

“Shout joyfully to the Lord?” (**Psalm 100:1**). Don’t you see? It’s at this very point in which sin has broken you. Even for those of you who can say: “Yes, the Lord is the delight of my heart. Yes I rejoice in the Lord. Yes I shout joyfully to the Lord. You are only all the more aware of your shortcomings. Jonathan Edwards says here

“The more a true saint loves God with a gracious love, the more he desires to love him, and the more uneasy is he at his [lack] of love to Him;

The more he hates sin, the more he desires to hate it, and laments that he has so much remaining love [for] it;

The more he thirsts and longs after God and holiness, the more he longs to long, and breathe out his very soul in longings after God.”¹⁵

You see, no matter where you are at this morning, you are not glad enough in God. Either because you are going through the motions, or because the closer you draw the light of God’s love, the more you see the darkness of your own heart. You’re in the same place as ancient Judah. You don’t measure up to the gladness that God requires.

II. The Gloom God Threatened

King Jehoiakim and the people of Judah

Look with me again at v.1 “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and *besieged* it.” Now there were three campaigns that Babylon engaged against Jerusalem. This is the first campaign, and it took place in 605 b.c. The second campaign was in 597 b.c. and the third in 587 b.c.¹⁶ You can find the historical record of these campaigns in **2 Kings 24-25** (also cf. **2 Chronicles 36**).

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, (USA,: Feather Trail Press, 2009), pg. 179

¹⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 25

King Jehoiakim was the son of King Josiah, who was last good king of Judah. Unlike the kings of Israel, all the kings of Judah were direct descendants of King David. But Jehoiakim himself was a wicked king. In one incident that took place the very year¹⁷ of the captivity, Jehoiakim took God's own words that were written on a scroll and cutting them up with a knife and threw them in the fire (**Jeremiah 36:23**). This act was simply unheard of. Even his wicked servants,¹⁸ "urged the king not to burn the scroll, [but] he would not listen to them." (**Jeremiah 36:25**) Now Jehoiakim's wicked heart really reflected the flavor of the whole nation. They had enough of God. Not only had Judah's priests grew tired of the Word of God (**Hosea 4:6**), but the people themselves shut their ears to God's word. God says of them **Isaiah 30:9-11** that "they were a rebellious people...children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord; who say...to the prophets "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions...let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."¹⁹ Judah's apostasy had become so great that it ceased to be a blessing for the nations. Judah ceased to be a "light which should lighten the Gentiles...Instead, she was a rebellious and stiffnecked people, ripe for

¹⁷ I believe this was the very same year. Daniel 1:1 tells us that the captivity took place in the third year of King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah 36:1 tells us this event took place in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim. But the Babylonians counted the reign of kings differently than the Jews. They didn't consider the first year of a king to be part of his reign, but rather part of his ascension to the throne. And Daniel being a statesman in the Babylonian court, educated in Babylonian ways would have recorded history as such. Therefore the fourth year record by the Jew Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:1) would have been the same as the third year recorded by a Babylonian educated Jew (Daniel 1:1). Source: John MacArthur, *God's Man for a Time of Crisis, Pt. 1, Daniel 1:1-2, Sunday, September 23, 1979*

¹⁸ I don't know much about these servants—Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah, but the previous verse says that these servants along with the king did not fear the word of the Lord when they heard it—"Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments." Jeremiah 36:24

¹⁹ Deut. 28:20 "The Lord will send on you curses... because you have forsaken me
 1 Chronicles 9:1 "Judah was taken into exile...because of their breach of faith."
 2 Chronicles 34:24-25 "I will bring disaster...because they have forsaken me."
 2 Chron. 36:15-16 "the wrath of the LORD rose...until there was no remedy."
 Isaiah 5:13 "My people go into exile for lack of knowledge."

judgment.”²⁰ The city of God— Jerusalem had become virtually identical with the city of man— Babylon.

The captivity was the most devastating event for the city of God in the OT

When King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Judah, taking her captive, this marked the most devastating event in the OT. This is true for two main reasons. The first reason why this was the most devastating event in the OT is because the people of God were handed over to a most severe judgement. **Deuteronomy 28** laid out all the curses of forsaking God.²¹ As horrible as all the wasting diseases and scorched earth that God threatened the Jews with,²² the worst type of judgment was handing them over to more sin.

Deuteronomy 28:53 tells us that they became so vicious during the siege that they ate their own children. “And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you.”

Deuteronomy 28:64 tells us that they gave themselves over to the worship of demonic entities “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.”

This is the worst kind of punishment. Seneca the pagan philosopher once said that “the greatest punishment for sinners is sin.”²³ Dear congregation, it is a fearful thing when a person is given over to greater and greater sin. To be a slave to sin is the most horrible type of existence. Tolkien captured this well in

²⁰ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel, A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pg. 17

²¹ v.20 “The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do...because you have forsaken me.”

²² Some of these curses include horrible physical ailments: v.22 “The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever” v.28 “The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of the mind”

²³ Ralph Venning, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2008), pg. 128

The Lord of the Rings. When Gollum found the One Ring, he came to love it. “He both loved it and hated it. Tolkien tells us. He hated the darkness, but even more than that he hated the light. But even while he hated the Ring, he hated himself for loving it, he could not give it up. His love for it was too great. This Ring stole his will and made him its captive.”²⁴ To be given over to more sin is the worst type of existence. To love what you hate, to give yourself over to those things which only bring you misery. This is slavery of the worst kind. That’s the first reason why this captivity was the most devastating event in the OT, because God’s own people were given over to sin.

The second reason why the captivity was the most devastating event in the OT was because this meant “the defeat, if not the disappearance of the city of God.”²⁵ Judah as a national identity crumbled to the ground. They were plucked out of the promised land. The temple was destroyed. The official worship prescribed by God ended. David’s throne became vacant. E.J. Young says here “The exile brought to an end the independent existence of the nation as the theocracy. Its constitution as a nation which had been revealed at Sinai now disappeared, never again to be seen. Even when the people returned from Babylon and again erected the Temple, there was a difference. The soul of the theocracy was gone. The old Sinaitic constitution was never again really established.”²⁶ In one sweeping verse—**Daniel 1:1**—everything that happened from Abraham to Moses to David through the monarchy was now dissolved by the sound of Babylonian war cries. Everything is lost. All of the Jews worst nightmares were coming true.

You can hear this utter despair in **Psalms 137:1-4** “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our lyres. For there our captors required of us songs,

²⁴ David Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today’s World*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), pg. 74-75

²⁵ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 26

²⁶ Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel, A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), pg. 16-17

and our tormentors, mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”

That’s how the book of Daniel opens. Utter gloom. And this is why this book transcends all the centuries of literature that have come and gone. It answers the question how can the people of God—the Christian—worship God in a land of exile—in Babylon? How can you worship God when you are not glad in Him like you ought to be? How can you worship God in a culture that is absolutely hostile to your faith? How will you persevere in believing in God when everything in your life seems to fall apart? How shall you sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? Daniel’s prophetic book answers those questions. It is as one author said “a realistic survival manual for the saints.”²⁷

III. The Gospel God Planned

The Lord *gave* the city of God over to the city of man

Please look with me at **v.2** “And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar’s) hand,” Do you see? “The Lord *gave* Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.” This was the Lord’s doing. In **v.1** we see that man is **active** in history—“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon *came* to Jerusalem and *besieged* it.” But in **v.2** we see that God is the **author** of history—“The Lord *gave* Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.” Nebuchadnezzar is oblivious to this. He thinks he built his empire by his own mighty power (**Daniel 4:30**). But the truth is, it is God Himself who was the chief architect behind “the defeat of his own people and the overthrow of his own city.”²⁸ This exile was not “an accident of fate or the tragic result of expansionist policies of imperial Babylon

²⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 26

²⁸ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher’s Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 27

in the late seventh century B.C.”²⁹ This exile happened because, God gave handed Judah over to Babylon. He is sovereign. Not Nebuchadnezzar.

Devastating theologies

One of the most devastating theologies in modern evangelicalism is the theology that says God doesn’t control all things. He simply knows what’s going to happen. His sovereignty is reduced to *mere* authority. His sovereignty is reduced to *mere* monarchy. As if to be sovereign *only* means that God is King.³⁰ When something terrible happens, this theology allows its followers to say that “God didn’t want this to happen. This wasn’t part of God’s plan.” But the message of the book of Daniel is that not only is God King, but He is *the* King who controls all things in this universe.³¹

It would not have been comforting to tell the Jews “God didn’t want this to happen. This wasn’t part of His plan. The god of the Babylonians—Marduck—was simply stronger or wiser than Yahweh.” If God wasn’t in control of their present, how could He possibly be in control of their future? You see God’s sovereignty is not this abstract doctrine that is reserved only for Facebook debates in our generation. It is *the* doctrine for when the bottom of life falls out.

God is sovereign over every tragedy

John Piper has wrestled with this doctrine out loud for a whole generation of Christians. When he was twenty eight years old, he received that one phone call that nobody want stop get. It was his brother-in-law. He said “Johnny, I’ve got bad news. Are you ready?” “Yes.” “Your mother was just

²⁹ Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 5

³⁰ Of course we need to ask if this is offered: king of what? If a king doesn’t control his kingdom, how can he be said to be a king?

³¹ God controls the intellectual abilities of all human beings—1:17; God controls the dreams of all men—2:28; God controls the flames of the hottest furnace—3:25; God controls the sanity of the kings of the earth—4:34; God controls when wicked kings are judged—5:30; God controls whether lions will eat or not—6:22; God controls the future of all earthly kingdoms—ch.7; God controls the end of time itself—ch. 12

killed in a bus wreck in Israel, and your dad may not make it.” And I said, “Do you know any more?” He gave me what details he had. And as I hung up, my little two-year-old Karsten is pulling on my pant leg. “Daddy, sad? Daddy, sad?” And I say to my wife, “Mother’s dead, and Daddy may not make it. Just let me be alone for a while.” I walked back to the bedroom and kneeled down by the bed and cried for two hours. I just heaved for two hours. And never once did I have any emotional anger at God. Never once did it occur to me I should somehow get upset about God. I simply thought, “If God cannot control the flight of a four-by-four flying through the front of a bus after a van hits it, I can’t worship him.” How can you worship a God who just fumbles the ball? He can’t control a piece of lumber? That’s not a God I’m going to worship. It is far easier to me to worship a God who is totally in control and offers me the mysterious hope *this is going to be good for you, for her, for your dad, for the cause of evangelism.*”³²

God’s faithfulness in this captivity

As gut-turning as the Babylonian captivity was for Judah, God’s sovereign exercise of handing them over to Nebuchadnezzar was actually an evidence of his faithfulness. God had told his people what would happen to them if they were to forsake Him.³³ God was doing exactly what He said He was going to do. God never, ever breaks His Word.³⁴ No matter what the cost

³² Source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/interview-with-john-piper> accessed May 13, 2018

³³ “we...meet a *faithful* sovereignty here. In beginning to give up Judah to Babylon the Lord is simply being true to his word spoken in the pas, both generally and specifically. In Leviticus 26, Yahweh has spelled out the blessings and the curses of the covenant; he had threatened that if he met repeated rebellion in Israel he would scatter them among the nations and leave them to rot in their enemies’ lands. Now that was beginning. But, more specifically, Isaiah had castigated King Hezekiah when that king had been willing to join an alliance with Merodach-baladin of Babylon (ca. 705 BC), trusting in their joint political-military muscle as a way of facing the ‘Assyrian Question’. (Isaiah 39:66-7). Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL,.; IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 28

³⁴ Numbers 23:19 “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”

to Himself or to His people, He will always be faithful to His word.³⁵ And this meant that their future was not being determined by a brutal pagan king. It meant that their future was being controlled, by the Lord of all the earth.

God's faithfulness in your captivity

The same thing is true in your life. What will comfort you when the bottom falls out? Platitudes about how God didn't want this to happen? Or the God who says "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father...Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." (**Matthew 10:29, 31**). If God is in control of sparrows, if God is control of trivial things, how much more so is He in control of everything that is happening to you. There are no such thing as accidents in God's sovereign universe. Cancer. Wasting disease. The death of a child. Out of control anxiety. Crippling depression. Financial hardship. There is not one thing in your life that God has not planned. He's not forgotten about you or abandoned you. He's working, laboring, moving in your life for the greatest good.

The Babylonian Media

But God's Sovereignty is not enough. For Judah, the defection was too deep. Mere control could not rescue them. And neither can mere control rescue you. Please look with me at **v.2** one more time. "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god." Dale Davis offers some valuable insight here "There is no doubt how the [Babylonian] Media would have viewed this. In the

³⁵ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher's Commentary, OT Vol. 21: Daniel*, (Nashville, TN.,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pg. 28

"the recognition that their fate came from the hand of God as a faithful act of judgment was itself an encouragement to the exiles. Their future was not controlled by Babylon or its gods, but by the Lord, the God of heaven. (Dan. 2:19)" Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 7

Ancient Near East the fortunes of a god and a people were viewed together. That Judah's king and temple vessels were taken simply mean that the Lord was not able to protect them. If the people were losers, it meant the Lord was a loser. Much like the Olympics. If an athlete representing a nation loses an event, we may say his or her nation 'lost.' Kenya lost, Germany lost, the USA lost. There is the identification...So the Lord knew how it would 'look' when he gave his king, his people, his utensils into Babylonian power. Pagans would be singing, 'Praise Marduk, from whom all blessing flow.'³⁶

The Lord who is glad in God & suffers shame for you

You see from the very beginning of this book, it is the Lord who chooses to identify with the shame and defeat of His own people. It is the Lord who chooses to have His own reputation be treated shamefully, and scornfully. It is the Lord who is mocked. You see God can not allow His people to continue to ignore Him. That has to be remedied. Nor can God allow simply overlook you lack of gladness in God. The message of Daniel is that though Judah had been taken captive and exile, there is One greater than Daniel who was taken captive and exiled for you.³⁷ Daniel prophesies about the coming Son of Man in Daniel 7. The Lord Jesus Christ.

What sets apart Jesus Christ, is that He was always glad in God. It was His delight to do the Father's will. **Psalm 40:8** "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." There was never a time when Jesus lacked the perfect amount of joy and obedience to His Father. He never longed to obey God more, because Jesus obeyed Him perfectly. Yet, at the end of His life, as He was being crucified, He asked the most important question to His Father. He asked "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Matthew 27:46**) That is the question of the ages. Why was Jesus forsaken by the Father? Jesus was forsaken so that we could be forgiven.

³⁶ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 29

³⁷ Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. xiii

This was Judah's great crime against God. Remember the curses in Deuteronomy 28? **v.20** "The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do...*because you have forsaken me.*" Jesus on the cross asked "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Because we forsook God. That's the price for us to be forgiven.³⁸ Babylonian captivity wasn't sufficient to pay for Judah's sins. God can by no means clear the guilty (**Ex. 34:7**). The message of Daniel is that though God's people have forsaken Him—though you have forsaken Him—there is One greater than Daniel who was forsaken by God in your place.

If you have not been born again, if you have not surrendered to Jesus Christ you have to understand that you still belong to Babylon. You are at war with God. You have forsaken your creator. You are a slave to sin. Do you enjoy being a slave? Do you enjoy the bondage of both loving and hating your sin at the same time? Do you enjoy knowing that you are truly all alone in the world? This picture of captivity is the picture of the eternal separation that is coming. Jesus said "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." (**John 3:36**). Jesus has made a way for you to flee from the wrath to come. But you must turn to Him. You must turn away from the love affair that you have with yourself. Forsake Babylon—forsake the city of destruction, and embrace the Savior.

Dear congregation. For the rest of you who have already passed from death to life, who already belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, know that this Jesus whom you love, who loves you, He is One who empowers you to live in this present captivity. This present age is not our final rest. We can identify with the Psalmist who asked "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (**Psalms 137:4**) Daniel answers that question. Kingdoms rise and fall. Persecution comes and goes. But we can sing because Jesus has already taken

³⁸ This helps us to see why God could promise to show them mercy in Leviticus 26:44 after God elucidated the curses of breaking the covenant. "Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the LORD their God."

captivity captive. **Revelation 11:15** “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”