



Study 3— Courage Under Fire

Daniel 3 & 6

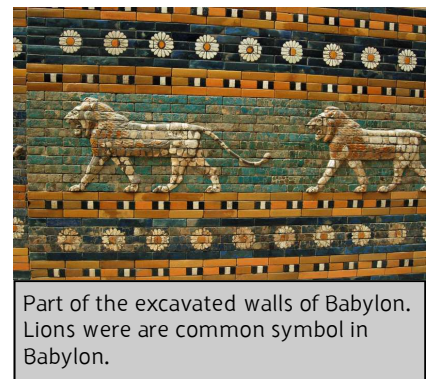
The passages we're looking at today may be familiar to many. If you grew up having the bible read to you, was there ever a more exciting story than 'Daniel in the Lion's Den'?! But to really understand what's going on with this dramatic rescue story, we need to get a handle on the situation that the Israelites find themselves in, living in the land of Babylon.

Remember the historical background from study 1. God had rescued the people out of Egypt and shown himself to be their powerful and saving God. In response all God expected was that they love and show allegiance to him. The famous 10 commandments tell us this,

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them". [Exodus 20:2-4].

But the sad fact is, Israel in their history constantly strayed from the one true God and followed after the gods of the nations around them. That's why God eventually allowed Israel to be attacked. It's because of God 's promised punishment, that what's left of Israel finds itself now living in the foreign empire of Babylon.

It's worth thinking about what it must have been like for the Israelites arriving in Babylon. As they were first marched into the city of Babylon—they would have been filled with both awe and revolt. Awe – because of the awesome dimensions of the city. The huge Processional Way which led down the centre of the city was roadway paved with coloured stones and the road was lined with elaborate bricked walls depicting dragons and lions. Revolt - because everywhere they looked, they would have been reminded of the gods of this foreign power who had defeated them. A paving stone has been discovered that reads, 'I Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, paved this road with mountain stone for the procession of Marduk, my lord. May Marduk my lord grant me eternal life.'



Part of the excavated walls of Babylon. Lions were a common symbol in Babylon.

But upon arriving in Babylon, the circumstances of their exile may have surprised them. They actually weren't brought there to be prisoners, but to settle as free citizens. They could build houses, take on any employment, engage in agriculture. The words of the prophet Jeremiah reflect this situation:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."
[Jeremiah 29:4-7]

It's in this situation where the Israelites now have to work out how to live as God's people. And it would have raised lots of questions for them. What does it mean to be faithful to God when living in a foreign land? How much should they engage with the culture around them? When should they take a stand to be different and is it worth the cost? They were the sort of questions that would have been important to them. And they are still very important questions for us today.

Read Daniel 3

For an Israelite, it would have generally been comfortable to live in Babylon. But there was the tyrannical ruler Nebuchadnezzar who everyone knew not to mess around with. Passages like 1:10, 2:5-6; 3:13, 19 show us that King Nebuchadnezzar is a guy who could have done with some anger management classes! Chapter 3 give us a situation where Daniel's friends make a bold decision under pressure from the king, and then have to face the consequences.

- a) What is the stand that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego take?
- b) Why do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego act in the way they do?
- c) What does Nebuchadnezzar doubt (v15) and what is the 'gist' of the response that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego give in verses 16-18?
- d) What do you these men expect from God in this situation?

Let's turn to the similar story of Daniel and Darius, the new ruler in Babylon. **Read Daniel 6:1-18.**

- e) In verses 1-5, what are the qualities of Daniel that come through?
- f) What's the plan of the Babylonian officials?
- g) Why is it such a cunning plan?
- h) Do you think Daniel knew others would see him through the window?
- i) Imagine you don't know what happens next after Daniel is thrown in with the lions:



Imagine you're the king - what might you be thinking and feeling at this point?

Imagine you're the officials - what might you be thinking and feeling at this point?

Imagine you're Daniel, what might you be thinking and feeling at this point?

- j) At the end of the furnace and lion episode, how do the Babylonian rulers respond? What do they say about the God of the Jews?

Thinking about Daniel and Us

1. The three friends of Daniel in chapter 3 seem to have great confidence that God will rescue them from the fire. And God does! Daniel himself is rescued from the lions in Daniel 6. Should Christians similarly today expect rescue from painful situations? Why/Why not?

Passages like Timothy 3:12 tell us that those who follow Jesus will suffer for it. Pain and suffering is simply part of 'the package' of being Christian. But the lesson from Daniel 3 and 6 is that God is with his people. We may not really know who that figure in the fire was, but the big point is God was with them. That God will stick with his people is also the promise that is given to those who follow Jesus. Check out Matthew 28:20 and Romans 8:37-39.

2. In our own day, what are the situations where Christian people can show themselves to be different even when it may cost them?

3. Can you think of specific examples where yourself or others have done what they know to be right, even when it was painful?

4. In Daniel we see that the Babylonian rulers acknowledge that God is the one who saves and it's His powerful kingdom that will go on forever. How do Christians today understand that God is the one who saves and that God will establish His kingdom that will go on forever?

5. How is this understanding of God a comfort for Christian people who face pressure and persecution today?