

# Communion Preparatory Service

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Date: 11 May 2013

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Please turn with me again in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 1. Daniel chapter 1. I'm sure many of you will share with me a great fondness for the book of Daniel. It's such an exciting book in many respects. If any of you have or have come from families where doing Sunday afternoon Bible dramas was the thing, then Daniel is meat and drink for children with all of the action to do with gold images and resolute believers and fiery furnaces and lions in the den and so on. It's a wonderful book, a book of two parts. The first six chapters, of course, telling us the story, the biographical section, the story of Daniel and his friends, and then the very different second half of the book with what we call apocalyptic literature, the very striking imagery that is used as we look into the future. The book itself is unusual in having some of it written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. The first part of the book from chapter two is in Aramaic and then the second part in Hebrew. Some of the scholars think that the reason it was written like that is because the first chapters are directed to the world at large,

Aramaic being the lingua franca. This is a message for the nations that God is sovereign over all. And then the closing chapters of particular relevance to the Jewish people as to what lay ahead for them.

So it's a colorful, dramatic, exciting book, and in our day it comes with particular relevance for Christians in our own culture because it's all about being a believer in a culture that is hostile to the faith. It's all about the feeling of the psalmist in Psalm 137. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? We love the Lord. We want to sing His song, but everyone around us rejects His kingship. We're in a strange land. We're not at home. We're far from Zion. And that is increasingly how we feel in Scotland today as the Scottish heritage of Christianity being the norm recedes further and further into the past. We love the Lord

Jesus Christ. He is our Redeemer. We love to hear the story of the gospel. We are eager to obey His commands. We're aware of how frail we are and how poorly we follow Christ. We long to follow Him more closely. We long that the nation would acknowledge Him. And yet increasingly all around us there is the rejection of the Lord Jesus, hostility to the law of God, an increasingly pagan atmosphere.

And so there are pressures to compromise. There is a culture around us that would seek to make people in the land think and act as though there were no God. There is a resistance to the very sharing of the Christian message. And because that's the case, because that is our experience in 21st century Scotland, it is of great interest for us to come and to see how a man like Daniel coped in a pagan culture.

[ 4 : 1 0 ] And we find here a message that exhorts us to be faithful even when those who love the Lord are few in number and when there is institutionalized paganism all around us. It's also a message of great hope because it tells us that kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall, but God's purpose is unshakable.

And the cry one day will go up. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Son, and He shall reign forever and ever. And in the meantime, we are called to be faithful.

We're called to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. So, as we turn to this chapter together, we're going to look at under a number of headings. First of all, we're going to take note of the struggle between two kingdoms. Then we're going to see the strategy of Nebuchadnezzar to subjugate those He has brought into His kingdom. And then the strategy of God's people to resist this pressure.

And then finally, the success that is achieved through submission to the will of God. So, the setting, the struggle between two kingdoms. We have in the opening verses the setting of the story of Daniel given to us from two very different perspectives. There's first of all the perspective of a human historian placing the story of Daniel in the context of the flow of human kings.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. This is what the historical observer witnessed. This was the political and military events happening at the time. There were three stages in the fall of Jerusalem.

[ 6 : 37 ] This year is 605 BC. There would be another siege in 597 BC. And then in 586, 587 rather, the final siege in which Jerusalem would be destroyed and the people deported the following year. And in this first siege, Nebuchadnezzar had taken off into exile some of the Jerusalem nobility, including Daniel and his friends.

So, there is that human historian's perspective on the context for this account. But then there is also heaven's perspective given to us because in verse 2 we read, and the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his God. Behind the observable facts of history, there is an unseen divine hand that is working out its own purposes. Daniel is a man of God's Word, and he has a biblical worldview, and it is his understanding that God is the ultimate mover. He is the one behind all the events of history. And that awareness, that worldview that Daniel has, will be crucial for him, will be crucial for him as he takes his stand for God in a strange land.

And we see that there's a spiritual struggle going on. There's a hint of that even in the way that Nebuchadnezzar's empire is mentioned in verse 2. You'll see in the footnote in the NIV that for Babylonia the underlying word is Shinar, which takes us back in our minds to Genesis 11, where we first encounter this word Shinar, because this is where the people of the earth built that tower that became known as the Tower of Babel. On the plain of Shinar they built this tower, as they sought to, as it were, shake their fist at God and his rule, and to make a name for themselves.

Here again there is a spiritual struggle, the same struggle that first began in the Garden of Eden, and was flagged up by the Lord when he spoke of the enmity that there would be between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. And throughout the Bible we have this ongoing conflict, conflict between one kingdom and another, between light and darkness, the city of God and the city of this world, between Babylon and Jerusalem, between chaos and harmony. And it's into this conflict conflict that Daniel has been pitched. And it is into this context that we, as 21st century followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, live out our lives also. There is a community which is steered by a spiritual leader, a spiritual leader, by Satan, by Satan, which has no desire to have anything to do with the lordship of Jesus, who have ambitions to have a very different kind of rule extend over the world. And we have our eyes opened as we read a narrative such as Daniel as to the reality of the struggle to which we are called as we live out the life of the believer, a pagan culture. Let us look now at the strategy that Nebuchadnezzar had to subjugate these young men who had been brought into his domain.

It's striking here that the conflict, the fight, is over the hearts and minds of young people. Daniel was not much more than a boy when this action took place. We have an indication of his age from the dating of the chapter at the end, we are told that he was around into the reign of Cyrus, which was 539 BC, which makes it 70 years later. And so, it's likely that at that point, Daniel may have been in his mid-80s or so. And so, at this point, he would have been in his mid- or even teens. So, we think of Daniel in terms of being a 15 or 16-year-old.

[ 12 : 06 ] It's maybe not the mental picture that we usually have of Daniel, but he is a very young man. So, Nebuchadnezzar wants to win over these young men, these young men in the the the flesh of youth, from a privileged background, from the Jewish aristocracy. He knows that he needs to have a greater victory than one that is simply military. He knows that he needs to do more than simply rule over the physical bodies of his enemies. He wants their hearts and he wants their minds.

And when we think about that, it's actually quite a chilling thought, because the setting is not the gulag. It's not the concentration camp. This is Windsor. This is Chelsea, Ascalant. This is refined civilization. And within this refined culture, there's a struggle for supremacy. Nebuchadnezzar wants these Jewish young people to be saturated in Babylonian culture. He wants them to dress like Babylonians. He wants them to eat like Babylonians. He wants them to speak like Babylonians. He wants them to be marinated in all things Babylonian, so that they will enthuse over these things which they have come to call their own, to call their own, and so that one day they would even come to the point of laying down their lives for Babylon and all that it stands for. That's his aim. And he has this comprehensive plan to bring about this transfer of loyalty from Zion to Babylon.

You see that interestingly. You see it in some of the conflicts in different parts of the world.

In Burma, when the military junta took over in Burma, they quickly saw that their desire for a unified Burmese country with the culture of the majority Burmans was threatened by the fact that there were a number of significant, a significant number of ethnic groups that did not share these cultures, these core values rather. And so, they had different ways of subjugating the minorities. There was the renaming of the country, the breaking of links with the past, so Burma becomes Myanmar. There was the oppression of the minorities which resulted in them being relocated away from the places that they had given their loyalty to.

So, villages would be attacked by soldiers and the houses burnt down and the people moved away from the land and the territory that they had known and grown up with and had given their loyalty towards, and were relocated in new centers which were strange and unusual to them.

[ 15 : 33 ] And then there was the fiendish instrument that was given to the military, the freedom to rape the Karen and the Shan and the Kachin women, to rob them of their pride, to shame them, to break them, that they might be rebuilt in the image of their masters. Nebuchadnezzar had a plan, and again, it was a plan to capture hearts and minds in the finest of Israel's youth.

And first of all, his plan was to beguile them with privilege. He ordered that the chief court official, Ashpenaz, was to bring in some of the Israelite youth who were from the royal and the upper classes, and who had good looks and who had smart brains, and to bring them into the royal palace for special training. Now, this was a subtle approach. There are many people who would not be broken in a torture chamber who can be won over by the promise of influence and of wealth. The human heart is very, very deceptive. It can influence us in all kinds of situations. It can influence Christians in all kinds of situations. I need to be a little bit flexible here, you know, because if I keep my head down, if I don't stand out too much from the crowd, I could be of great influence. I could really get to the top of the ladder, and I could count for God. You see it in mainland denominations. You see people who would be broadly termed evangelicals being dazzled by the thought of being given positions of prominence in church courts. And there's always a price attached to advancement. And the thought is, well, if I will only bide my time, the opportunity will come to influence the direction that we're going.

But instead, what very often happens is that when we adopt that kind of thinking, our own personal convictions are what are influenced and weakened. It could take place not in church structures. It could take place in the workplace.

It could take place. We can convince ourselves that for the sake of having a greater influence, we need to compromise over this thing or that thing. Because if I don't offend the boss in this matter, I'm more likely to get that promotion which will make me a head of the department, and who knows how I could be an influence for good. You see that in the realm of sport, many Christians are convinced that what will convince the world is to have athletes who show that they are winners. And so, you need to have a big platform in which to be a celebrity Christian. And how few there are that are willing to take a stand on issues such as professional sport on the Lord's Day? So, there is the carrot of privilege.

There's the attempt to beguile these young people by bringing them into the royal courts and giving them all that their hearts could desire. And then there was the indoctrination through Babylonian culture.

[ 19 : 40 ] He was to teach them, that's Ashpenaz, was to teach them the language and the literature of the Babylonians. And you see what Nebuchadnezzar is thinking? He's thinking that if they can be so completely immersed in the Babylonian literature and history and culture, they will begin to see the world around them with Babylonian eyes. They will have what we would call a Babylonian world view.

Our world view is so important, isn't it? The way we look at the world around us. We don't look at the world around us in a neutral way. We look at it from a particular perspective.

And the predominant world view in Britain today is that which is described by the Psalmist in Psalm 10, speaking of the wicked, where he says, God is in none of his thoughts.

Alistair Campbell said, we don't do God. And across the board, and so many departments of the media today, that is precisely the case. One of the great tools in promoting a completely secular, godless world view is the promotion of evolutionary theory, because where evolution is promoted, it seems to do away with the necessity of a creator in explaining the world around us.

And Christians, on the other hand, we're called to have a Christian world view. And it's our calling to look at the world around us from a biblical perspective, and to look at our callings from a biblical perspective, so that whatever it is that God has called you to be, whether it's to be an engineer or a banker or a teacher or a plumber, we look upon our calling in a distinctively Christian way.

[ 22 : 00 ] We think seriously about how our work fits into our faith, and we seek to work out in our minds, first of all, and then in our practice, how God can be glorified by the attitudes and the principles that we bring to our work. And we look beyond our work, and we try to evaluate what we read about and hear about on the television and the popular culture around us, so we have a Christian view of politics and of music and of film and art and so on, so that whatever it is of God's world that we are confronted with, we are looking at it through the lens of the Bible.

And there was this great pressure in Babylon that these young men would begin to look at things around them as though they too were true blue Babylonians.

Thirdly, the king wanted to win them over by compromise. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. Now, it's interesting that we're not told exactly what the danger here was to the four young men. Some commentators suggest that it may have been the fact that the food was ceremonially unclean, and so they didn't want to be compromised by taking ceremonially unclean food, perhaps food that had been dedicated to false gods. But if it had been a matter of the food being dedicated before it being fed to them, then the issue would have remained with the vegetables which they ate later on. And it's possible that Daniel simply saw this this haute cuisine for what it was. It was an attempted bribe. It was giving them the high life in order to get them on track.

These were pleasures that he had never known before. He was being seduced by this Babylonian lifestyle. Jeff Thomas comments on this. He says, There was danger in that dining hall. Of course, there is danger in the lion's den. But there's danger, too, in restaurants. Being bought by expensive account meals and clinking glasses and someone else paying the bill and your stomach becoming Satan's ally. Is that not a danger?

Daniel saw the danger. Daniel saw the danger. The fourth ploy again had to do with language, because the king had his official change their names. The Israelite names were continual reminders to them of the Lord that they served. Daniel and Mishael both contained the syllable L, which was one of the words for God.

[ 25 : 06 ] Daniel means God is my judge. And the other two names of the friends were abbreviated forms of Jehovah.

And the names that they're given have references to the false gods of the Babylonians, Aku and Nego. And so, one of the tools that the world around us uses to shape the way that we think is the way that it handles language.

Think of the way that words have changed their meaning as society has become less Christian. Think of the way that, for example, sin and wicked are used today in popular culture. They're used very often in a good sense.

Think how the term born again is often used of cars or of the careers of actors. Think of how words like holy and purity are often given a negative connotation. Or think especially of how the word gay has been used to promote a certain attitude, to manipulate people's moral attitudes.

So, language is a powerful tool. And Nebuchadnezzar knew how to use it in order to mold his Israelite subjects. And we need to have our eyes open in our day as to how the secular culture uses language to shape the way people think.

[ 26 : 50 ] So, there was a strategy for subjugating these people, these young people in the royal palace. But they, Daniel at least, had his strategy for resistance. And the key verse in the story is verse 8 where we read, but Daniel, but Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.

Daniel drew a line. Daniel said, In advance of the crisis, I will go no further. This I will not do.

This was non-negotiable. Daniel would not protest at the change of names. Six and stones may hurt my bones, but names will never harm me. He wouldn't object to the change of name.

He didn't protest at having to learn Babylonian language and culture, but he would not sell his soul for the sake of fine wine and dining. It's as though Daniel is seeing the lions in the banqueting hall.

And beforehand, he is resolved. He has a line drawn in the sand. Now, if Daniel had not been faithful at this point, what would have happened later on when it came to the lions in that den?

[ 28 : 36 ] Very often Christians make the mistake of focusing on what they anticipate will be the big issue. When it comes to the big issue, I'll make my stand. But so happens the big issue never really seems to present itself, does it? And all along the way, we make little compromises and we sell ourselves short in areas we haven't thought through. So when the big issue comes, we're completely compromised.

Daniel had he decided to turn a deaf ear to his conscience here until he was in a stronger position, stronger position socially perhaps. He would never have had the spiritual strength that he needed to cope with the positions of influence that God would later give to him.

So there's a lesson here. There's a lesson for all of us. There's a lesson perhaps especially for those who are at Daniel's stage in life. Daniel, remember, is a young teenager. And the temptation when we are young is to think, I will take my stand when I know more of life, when I'm established, and when I can gain people's respect in talking openly about Christ and obeying his commands.

But by the time we think that we are respected and established and our career is up and running, then our compromises may have robbed us of all spiritual strength. And therefore, there's no point, is there in dreaming our lives away and thinking of how we would cope in the interrogation room or in front of the media.

But with realism, we need to think of how it is we will stand for Jesus in the dressing room or at the office party. Daniel was early and he was decisive in his stand.

[ 31 : 01 ] And notice also that he makes his stand with such grace. Sometimes Christians can undo all the good that a stand of principle could make by the ungracious way in which they verbalize their reluctance to do something.

But Daniel epitomizes grace. He speaks respectfully to Ashpenas when he asks for this exemption from taking the food. Even although Ashpenas has been made sympathetic by God towards Daniel, he's afraid and justifiably that if this goes horribly wrong and the flesh falls off these young men that he will lose his head, that Nebuchadnezzar will take a dim view of this. And Daniel doesn't go into the huff. He doesn't speak harshly. He speaks with all humility. Please, he says, test your servants for ten days. He's quite reasonable.

He doesn't want to embarrass the man. He doesn't want to endanger his life or put his job at risk. He shows genuine, Christ-like meekness in seeking to take his stand, which again is a great example to us in our secular culture, that if we want to be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, then we need to be clear in advance where we will take our stand, not to leave things unthought of beforehand so that we make decisions on the hoof, but to draw the line in advance and then be gracious when we make that stand, be gracious with unbelievers.

So it's always better, isn't it, rather than to notify somebody by an email or a letter to speak to them. So that they can see the wrestling, perhaps, that we've undergone in coming to the decision, that we can see that we're not doing it to show that we're better or superior to them in any way, but that we have a loyalty to one who is higher than any earthly boss or any earthly king.

And harsh and abrasive and discourteous attitudes only bring dishonor to the name of the Lord Jesus.

[ 33 : 22 ] So Daniel takes his stand with much bravery and with great grace, and God honors Daniel.

He who honors me, I will honor. God always honors his people who seek to honor him sooner or later, in one way or another. And we cannot dictate to God how or when that will be, but he will honor those who honor him. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. And when the time came and they were presented to the king, they excelled all the rest, and they were brought into the king's service. And there's a lovely, triumphant note at the end of the chapter because we read, Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Seventy-five years later, and Daniel is still around. Kings come and go. God's rule remains, and God's servant is there, influencing for good. Not because he has clung on to position and privilege by compromise, but by adhering to God at whatever the cost. God has honored him and is pleased to use his servant. What an example. What an example for all of us, especially for those who are in the world that we are in the world that we are in the world that we are in the world that is hostile to the truths that we have received and have come to believe and love. Here's the lesson from Daniel's

Bible. It's not what you will stand. It's not what you end up doing. It's not where you end up serving, but it's who you are that counts in God's kingdom. Therefore, may God enable us to resolve, to be faithful, whatever the cost. Gracious God, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for the inspiring account of Daniel and his stand in a strange land when under all manner of pressure to compromise and to side with those who had influence and power. Lord, we pray that you would enable us your people in the culture in the culture in which we are called to live out our lives to, by grace, seek to honor you, seek to cleave to your law, and graciously testify to your lordship over all life. For we ask this in the name of our precious Lord and King, Jesus. Amen.

We're going to conclude our worship this evening singing from Psalm 20, and it's from the Sing Psalm section of the book. Psalm 20. June is St. Daniel. May the Lord answer you when you cry in distress. May Jacob's God keep you.

Whose name you confess, may God send assistance from his holy place and grant you from Zion support by his grace. Psalm 20, and page 24. May the Lord answer you when you cry in distress.

[ 37 : 29 ] May the Lord answer you when you cry in distress. May the Lord answer you when you cry in distress. May Jacob's God keep you.

May the Lord answer you when you cry in distress. You rest for grief in distress. May the Lord answer you when you are lazy. May the Lord ask and be in distress.

May God send us from this holy place and grant you from Zion support by His grace. For a glorious man care, or poor lady, or manyimat ■■■, O pymra Bush seek in distress.

Lord by His grace. May God keep in mind every sacrifice made, and set on the altar your offerings made.

And may He fulfill the desire of your heart, success to His one all pure plans to impart.

[ 38 : 58 ] With joy we will shout when your victory's won.

We'll lift up our manners in costing alone. And so may the Lord hear your earnest request, and answer your prayers as sins to Him best.

Now truly I know that the Lord from above protests His anointed in covenant love.

From heaven in His holiness God hears His try, and stays by the power all is right and all night.

In horses are chariots, some trust for defense, but the name of the Lord is our strong confidence.

[ 40 : 46 ] their cross to their knees while they'll simply arise.

O Lord, save the gate near and answer our Christ.

And now may grace, mercy, and peace from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon you now and forevermore. Amen.