

VIII. Daniel in Biblical Perspective
An Overview Of Daniel 1 – 4
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We will look at Daniel 3 and take tonight to review to set ourselves up for the next study in Daniel 4 but we will also take a look at the conflicting calls to the people that were taking place from the prophets while they were in exile. It is the conflict that took place before the false prophet Hananiah and the true prophet that spoke to them while they were there and that was Jeremiah. Daniel 3:8 is where we left off on November 15, 2009. So we will start there.

Daniel 3:8-30 says, **8** *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.* **9** *They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever!* **10** *You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image.* **11** *And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.* **12** *There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”* **13** *Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.* **14** *Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? **15** Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”* **16** *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. **17** If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **18** But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”* **19** *Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. **20** And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. **21** Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. **22** Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. **23** And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. **24** Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” **25** He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” **26** Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach,*

and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. 28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

I am going to briefly go over Daniel 1, 2, and 3 and then I want to give you two basic principles from this event that also draws on Daniel 1, 2, and 3 to answer the question – how can we who are believers live by faith and live the life of faith in an unbelieving world? To answer this question I will give you two points to it. So how can believers live faithfully and effectively in a world of unbelief? One might say, “Harry is that a relevant question?” I would say absolutely it’s a relevant question. Do you remember the prayer of Jesus in John 17? John 17:6 and 15 says, **6** *I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 15* *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.* (Protect them) He will also make very clear that we are to be in the world but not of the world.

Historically and it’s true of the covenant people of God, Israel, while they were in Babylon, there have been two errors that God’s people have made in the call to live a faithful and effective life by faith in the midst of a world in unbelief. One mistake is that we don’t get in the world; we let the world get into us. We get over assimilated by being in the world. We get over assimilated in the sense that we let the world in us. So instead of being in the world and not of the world, we’re in the world yet of the world. The Christian loses their distinctive message. That’s a real concern I have today in our effort to respond to the sense that we live in a culture that wants to marginalize us and declare religion in general but Christianity in particular as irrelevant. We are trying to find ways to connect from worship to evangelism message and everything. My fear is that in our connecting we lose what actually draws people to Christ and that is our distinctiveness.

The Bible says in Titus 2:11-14, **11** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12* *training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13* *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14* *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people (peculiar unto Him – KJV) for his own possession who are zealous for good works.* We are to be distinct, holy, set apart in life style.

A good example of this is Lot. Lot pitched his tent near Sodom. Then he had a house in Sodom and then he had Sodom in him. He was still a believer. I think the Scriptures are clear on this in the epistle of Peter where it says his righteous soul was vexed (2 Peter 2:4-10). There was conviction within him but he had allowed himself to

get over assimilated. He lost his distinctiveness and actually became a laughing stock when he did attempt to stand on behalf of the angels that had come. So we are to be in the world but we are not to let the world in us.

The second mistake is that we create Christianity not as a counter culture in the culture, in the midst of the culture, but we treat Christianity as a subset of the culture. So we withdraw into our Christian ghettos. We have our Christian coffee houses. We give our Christian awards. We write our Christian music and books back and forth to each other. We do our movies back and forth to each other. They are not movies well enough to go into the main stream but movies that make us feel good. We are constantly engaged in activities where we have set up our church buildings as places where we retreat from the world instead of getting into the world.

Not long after I arrived here our Briarwood Christian School was facing a challenge because of the decisions of the athletic associations as to where they would place private schools instead treating each student as a student. It was determined that each student would be treated as one in a third so that would immediately take a smaller school and put it into other classifications. There was no hesitancy at all. We're not going to retreat. It that's what the call is then that's what it is because we want to be in the world. When it comes to the world of athletics we want our athletes to compete for the honor of Christ in the midst of where ever it is. I think that it was absolutely right to do that. We are to be in the world and not retreat from it for the sake of purity and we don't go live in a Christian ghetto. We don't remove ourselves to communes. We stay in the world but not of the world. So how do you avoid those to errors or mistakes?

Let's back up and walk through very quickly the book of Daniel. In Daniel 1 there is this recording of the sending of the people Israel in to exile under the refiner's fire of God, the judgment discipline of the Lord for seventy years. He came up with that number, seventy years, from Leviticus 25 where the Sabbath year was set aside and Leviticus 26 said that if you do not give My land rest and consecrate it unto Me and observe the Sabbath years then I will give the land rest from you and I will remove you. They did not observe not only the year of jubilee, they did not observe the Sabbath year so they were removed from the land for seventy years until they would be brought back as God would honor that Sabbath year principle even though His people would not. God will collect His Sabbath. God will appoint that day of rest and so He did. It was a year of rest in that case.

So they go into this seventy year exile and it takes place by three conquering moves by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar comes in 605 BC, 597 BC and 586 BC. The first time he came through in 605 BC he defeated the tribe of Judah or the southern kingdom and put them under his control. He set them up as a vassal state but he didn't deport many of the Israelites. He only deported about 10,000 and they were very specifically of the professional class. He also gave directions in Daniel 1 by saying find people of nobility, people that look good, people that have academic credentials, people of royal birth and bring them. So they went to the tribe of Judah and Daniel would have been of the tribe of Judah and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego which were their Babylonian names, were then taken out along with 10,000 others and brought back. They are given Babylonian names, put into a Babylonian school and were given a Babylonian diet.

Daniel and the three young men go along with this. The obviously didn't make an issue with the names and took them. They didn't make an issue of the schools that they were going to. I guess they went to the international school of Hebrews to learn how to be a Babylonian or something like that. They were going to make them think like Babylonians and so they taught them the language of the people. They taught them the literature of the people particularly of the wise men cast or the Chaldeans as they were called. The one thing that Daniel said they would not do is the diet. Why? It wasn't simply because the diet had content that they could not eat but it was because the diet of the king was taken from the altar of sacrifice to false gods. So Daniel says we will not defile ourselves but Daniel doesn't do it in a haughty spirit. In fact, Daniel comes to the chief eunuch who is over him and he realizes the chief eunuch and the one under the chief eunuch fear for their lives. So Daniel says let's just do a test. Let's do it for ten days and see what happens. After ten days it was very clear that God had intervened supernaturally.

Their appearance was better so they entered into it for the three years of their education. They engaged in the diet and the education so that when they were examined by Nebuchadnezzar he said, "I don't have anyone like this among all my wise men in all of my kingdom." So they were put up and even over the wise men of that day. They had stood firm but they had stood firm in a winsome way and in a righteous way. They were in Babylon but not of Babylon. I'd like to stop here for a small parenthesis that I think needs to be stated.

When I see how Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are able to function in that setting there are two things that strike me. The first thing is that while they are there they know the literature, the language, they know the stuff of their culture. It was just like when Paul knew the Epicureans. Paul knew the Stoics. Paul knew what the Greek philosophers thought and believed. They knew the stuff of their culture as well as the people who by faith had bought into the world and life view of that culture. Yet when Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego show up and they are about 14 to 16 years of age, somebody back home had built into them a consistent, God centered, world and life view. They had that world and life view that had been Biblically framed, God centered and gave them stability then they knew what every body else believed as well or better than they did.

What I find again is that we make one or two mistakes. We either allow our covenant children to be educated by the world without a Christian world and life view so they are swayed and confused or we simply educate them with our world and life view but they never understand what people in the world believe. Not only does that make you ineffective but that is also a statement that you're not treating other people with dignity even though they believe what's false. If you really love those people you want to know why and what they believe. You really want to understand it and not that it's in us but that we are aware of it. What is in us is that solid world and life view that when they showed up in Babylon somebody had already put that in their life because they knew how to respond winsomely but firmly. They knew what to say "no" to and they knew what they didn't need to say "no" to. They said we'll take a name and yes we'll go to this school but they also knew when to say "no." This diet will defile us and we are not going to do something that would dishonor God as a false act of worship.

It is that kind of thinking that is mature and developed and we need to engage this kind of thinking in ourselves. I don't believe in atheistic Darwinism macro evolution but I want to know why someone does. I want to know what their arguments are. I do want to treat them with dignity and I want to give an answer so that the foolishness and folly of unbelief does not go unanswered thoughtfully and wisely. I could go on with illustration after illustration. That is what is in this text where they understood and had that solid world and life view and then they knew what the Babylonians believed and knew better than they did. And for 80 years Daniel will make an impact because of it.

Then of course we move to Daniel 2 where Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and he tells his wise men that he doesn't want the interpretation first but he wants them to tell him what the dream is. His wise men said, "Nobody can do that. We can give you the interpretation but we can't give you the dream that's what you had." Nebuchadnezzar said, "Well, I don't remember it so you tell me what the dream is. In fact if you can't tell me what the dream is I'm going to kill you." So eventually the king gets put out with them and decides to kill all the wise men. So when the king's men show up to kill Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel says, "Don't do that." Daniel doesn't just save himself and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, but he also saves the other Chaldeans. He doesn't just look out for his fellow believers he even looks out for those whom are his business associates. Daniel intervenes for them.

Daniel of course, shares the dream and brings the interpretation. The interpretation declared the kingdoms of this world were top heavy and they were going to be destroyed because there is a Kingdom of God coming. This Kingdom of God will unfold and grow like a stone that is uncut from a mountain. That stone that is uncut from a mountain is a Stone that is sent from Mount Zion to Mount Calvary and will come back at the Mount of Olives. It is that Stone that destroys the kingdoms of this world. It is the Stone of the Kingdom of God that goes throughout all of the nations and all of the peoples as it gathers a people in the name of Christ Jesus and it rolls forward getting larger and larger in all of its power.

We now come to the situation at hand where Nebuchadnezzar makes for himself a golden image. That golden rises up and is to be worshiped by everybody. There is something in play here that you need to see, know and be aware of in our age as well. The Babylonian empire like its predecessor, the Assyrian empire, like its predecessor the Greek empire and then the subsequent successor to that is the Roman empire, were all pluralistic. They were so pluralistic that they would come in and take a statue of a god, put it up and just shift heads on it. They could have the god of their choice. They would let the people keep all of their tribal gods, their national deities and do all of that. But no nation can ever be multi-cultural. You have to have a culture. Culture is how you do business in society.

It's like a church. I remember when I was at Pinelands. When I would stand to preach at Pinelands I felt like I was preaching to the whole world. There was every shade of skin. There were unbelievable representations from nationalities all over South American, Central America, North America, and of course large numbers from the West Indies. One man came to the church to do an article and he said, "We heard this was a multi-cultural church." I said, "You're wrong. This isn't a multi-cultural church. We have many different nationalities represented, skin pigmentations, and people coming out of multiple cultures but we have a culture here and that is Jesus is King. The Word of

guides us and we love each other in Christ and we learn how to love each other. What we are trying to demonstrate is that the Kingdom of God manifested in this church is something that transcends the culture and it's not a sub-culture. It stands in the culture and all who belong to Jesus are one in Christ. We who were not a people have become a people and we are the people of God."

I think the same thing is true in a nation. A nation may be made up of multiple sources of immigration but ultimately it can't be a smorgasbord but it has to be a melting pot or it will balkanize and it will destroy itself. These people knew that. Religion in and of itself is not what brought the people together because anybody could be what ever they wanted religiously but it was pluralistic. But there was one supreme shaper of the culture that everyone bowed to. No one was allowed to have a religion that said it alone was true. What brought the people together was you would confess my religion is just one among many and then all would bow to the state and its image. So the state would become sovereign. Today we call it state-ism. The state would become the messiah. It would be that which took care of you, delivered you and watched over you. You would bow to the state.

So Nebuchadnezzar sets up his golden image and he says you can have all your other gods but you can't say that you have The god. The way that we make sure you don't say we have The god is that you come and bow to this one who is god. Isn't interesting that when we get into a pluralistic society they say, "We're tolerant."? They also say, "You who say that Jesus is the Truth, the Way and the Life are intolerant. How can we trust you when you impose Jesus upon us?"

Let me ask this question. Did Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, chapter after chapter honor the One true and living God as a lone God? Did they ever impose that on anyone? Did they persuade people? Absolutely. Did they influence people? Absolutely, in fact Nebuchadnezzar is about to get converted in the next study. Certainly they would evangelize, influence, and impact but did they impose? No. Did they say to those who came and said to them, "you must worship the golden image' that they were not going to worship the golden image and if you try to make us we'll cut your throat? No, when they called for people to worship the golden image they just didn't show up. They are going to worship the One true and living God. Now when they were called out they confessed that they would only worship their God. They did say then, "We will not worship that golden image." Did they give threats to them? No. Vengeance is the Lord's. It's not theirs.

Where do we live? We live in a pluralistic society. Why is it that a Brit Hume on a national television broadcast, in an opinion segment, when he is asked a question about a golfer who has become the object of much reporting in terms of sexual immorality say that he doesn't have any doubt that he'll be back golfing but as a person what I would hope is that he wouldn't continue in a faith that at best in its own content only offers methods of coping. I would hope he would come to Christ who redeems, renews, forgives and changes you from the inside out. Why is it that that was met with an unbelievably uncomfortable silence at that moment? Why is that later that was met with castigation from every where? Let's say he would have said, "I hear that Tiger is a Christian and I'd like for him to consider Eastern Meditation." There probably would be no uncomfortable silence there yet the person would probably respond, "Well, that's an idea. I hear that helps people."

Please understand this. It's not simply a revulsion against the claims of Christ and the Gospel. The reason why that reaction is there is because of the exclusivity of the claim of Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man can come to the Father but through Him. You are more than welcome to offer help in any religion that doesn't claim to be true but when you offer Christ as the Truth and what He says is true then in a pluralistic society you will not be tolerated. Interestingly, those who confess Christ as the Truth, the Way and the Life are more than tolerant. They actually affirm ones right to believe or not believe. That doesn't mean what you believe may or may not be right but you have a right to believe, just like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

"Who are you not to bow down before me?" said the king. So what did Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say? They said, "O king we do not have to answer you for this." They weren't being sarcastic. They were just simply saying, "King, here is the life of faith in the One true and living God and king, for us to live that does not inquire us to do that. We will share that with you and will persuade you but we will not have to impose that upon you. We stand because of Him no matter where you stand."

Now how is it that you can live that way in a culture? Here are two things that address this. The first way is by the assurance of the promise of the presence of God. It is by the assured presence and power of God. Because they stood fast they were thrown in the fiery furnace. Did you happen to notice how long this chapter was? Do you know why? It keeps repeating things like the instruments and how the king is addressed. Did you notice how many times it said fiery furnace?

If you will fast forward to the Gospel of Matthew on five different occasions Jesus teaches us on the doctrine of hell using the phrase fiery furnace. Some commentators say Jesus is using that same phrase 'fiery furnace' to talk about hell playing off and using the language of Daniel. I don't think that's true. I believe that Jesus by the Holy Spirit had that phrase repeated time and time again in Daniel so we would understand its connection to hell in the New Testament when He would use it. I don't think Jesus is using it from Daniel. I think He put it in Daniel because He was going to use it there.

Why is that important to me? It is because I have a God who sent His Son into this world and then He sent His Son into this world where I live and I'm to be in the world and then so that I would not be of the world. He not only sent His Son into the world but He sent His Son into hell. He descended into the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar looks in that fiery furnace and says, "Fellows help me out here. Did we not put three men in there? I don't see anybody burning up. They're just kind of walking around in there. Now there's a fourth person in the fire and that fourth person is like the sons of the gods or like the son of the gods." I don't believe that was Nebuchadnezzar getting a special revelation whereby he is seeing Jesus and calling Him the Son of God. Nebuchadnezzar is using the language of Babylonian which is their phrase for something supernaturally angelic. In fact, later it will say 'like an angel.'

Now I believe that was Jesus. I believe that is a Christophany which is a pre-incarnate ministry of Christ. The angel of the Lord was a title for Him when He would show up in the Old Testament whether it was in the burning bush or wrestling with Joshua outside of Jericho or to Gideon. No matter when it was when He showed up that was a pre-incarnate ministry of Christ. I believe this incident in the fiery furnace is a pre-incarnate ministry of Christ. So how can I be in the world and not of the world? It is

because I have a Savior who is with me. I love that hymn that says soon and very soon I'll be in His presence but that will be by sight. I already know that one day I will be in His presence but today He is present with me. He says, "I am with you always even to the end of the age."

How is it that we can be in the world and not of the world? How is it that we can live in the confidence and winsomeness of standing firm and not engage in the bigotry of toleration but in the graciousness of affirmation of the dignity of other people with whom we talk? How is it that we can stand firm and be in the world but not of the world? It is because of the presence and power of the One true and living God with you and Nebuchadnezzar nails it. When they come out of the furnace unsigned and by the way that's a real miracle. A miracle is something you can't explain that's supernatural. It is a miracle that they come out of the furnace unsigned and you can't even smell smoke on them. Do you remember what Nebuchadnezzar says when they come out of the furnace? He says, "What God could deliver in this way?"

All the gods that Nebuchadnezzar had heard about told you what you had to go through to get up to him. This God comes down for you to be with you and will even descend into hell at the cross for you. He will take you to Himself soon and very soon but until then He'll be with you. In the world you have tribulation but in Me you have peace, (I want to add something here just for meaning) because I have come here, I have overcome the world and I will be with you to the end.

I'd like to show you this in Philippians 4. I think this is the proper use of the text but I just think it's not the ultimate use of the text. This is a marvelous text that gives us great encouragement. Philippians 4:4-9 says, *4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. (NAS says, 'the Lord is near.')* *6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

I'm not the greatest counselor in the world but I try to counsel and I try to help. I have used this passage and I think this is the proper use of the passage to some degree. This passage says you're not to have anxiety or fear. Ultimately what we fear reveals where our counterfeit idols are because we are saying we can't live without that or we can't live without turning out the way we think it ought to. So this is something we have to deal with. How do you deal with it? Here's how you deal with it.

There are five or six steps in the text. First, is to rejoice in the Lord. Drive out fear by rejoicing in the Lord. The second step is to be anxious for nothing by praying. Make it a matter of prayer. Thirdly, make sure your prayer is with thanksgiving. The fourth step is to fill your mind with that which is good, righteous, pure and excellent. I believe all of this is excellent disciple making insights but peace and power in this life, to live it fearlessly without anxieties, does not come with a five step program. Rejoice, prayer, give thanks and let your mind dwell on something else like what's good and pure. No, the key to the text is the Lord is near. The Lord is with you. Look how it ends.

Jesus Christ will stand guard over your heart. It literally means stand sentry. He is the sentry over your heart. You have the peace of God because the God of peace is with you (found in the last part of Philippians 4:9). The presence of God with His people is what gives them courage and destroys the fear that would paralyze them. This is the assured presence and power of God in Christ by that marvelous work of the Holy Spirit.

The second thing is the assumed position and presence of God's people. Where are we? We who are indwelt by the Lord and the One who is with us who has come into this world, who descended into hell on the cross and paid for our sins, it is this One who is now with us. So where are we to be? Because He is with us we are to be in the world but not of the world. Back in Babylon there was a false prophet by the name of Hananiah and he got into it with another prophet by the name of Jeremiah. Hananiah had one message Jeremiah had another message. Hananiah says, "I have broken the yoke of Jeremiah so let me tell you what you are to do." The place where most of the Jewish exiles were in Babylon was called Napur. Hananiah said, "Everybody get together. Be pure. Stay together. Don't get out there in Babylon. Draw together and come over here. Don't get touched by the Babylonians or their culture. Stay here and in two years Nebuchadnezzar is going to be put away and we'll all go home with the things from the temple."

Jeremiah said, "He is a false prophet not only in what he has promised but he is a false prophet in what he has prescribed. Here is the Word of the Lord to you who are sojourners, to you who are pilgrims, to you who are aliens in Babylon but not to be of Babylon. Here is the Word for you." I want to look at Jeremiah 28 where we see Hananiah the false prophet who is confronted by Jeremiah and then God gives a word Jeremiah and Jeremiah sends this letter Babylon that is recorded in the next chapter, 29. I don't have time to look at it all but I'll share what is in Jeremiah 29:4-14 which says, **4** *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. 8 For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, 9 for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. 10 "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

I hear many people quote that where the Lord's plans are not for my calamity but for my good. He has not planned evil He has planned good but what I don't hear is the Lord who made that promise prescribed in the earlier verses. What are we supposed to do in Birmingham? What are we supposed to do in this country? Is there a possibility

that God may visit this place with judgment? Absolutely, but what am I to pray for? It is welfare with the Gospel. What am I to do? I am to minister to her effectively. What am I supposed to do? I am to seek her welfare with Gospel living, Gospel preaching, Gospel love, Gospel deeds, and Gospel words. I am to be God's asset in this pagan culture and I am to win men and women and see their lives changed. When that has changed then that culture has changed.

God has called us to be in the world, not a sub-culture and not cooped by the culture. We are to be a counter-culture but an asset because of the Lordship of our Savior Jesus Christ and how He lives in us. How can we be in the world but not of the world? It is because of the assured presence and power of the Lord in you and the assumed position that you take. I am your ambassador in this world until You come again. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together. Thank You for the privilege to return to this book of Daniel with all of its challenges, insights and encouragements. Do guide and direct us Father that we might love You and serve You that we might be in the world but not of the world. Father, I thank You for Jesus who went into hell on the cross to pay for my sins. I thank You for Him who is risen and who now dwells within me by His Holy Spirit and who will never leave me nor forsake me nor any of these Your people. So with His assured presence, in this world in which we have tribulation and adversity, we might stand firm in love, courageous and compassionate, conviction and carefulness because He is near. He is in us and He is working upon us. He is working through us. Father, we will not retreat into the ghetto of religion even in the name of Christianity. We will not comfortably remove ourselves to live in a religious bubble. Father, we won't just be in our city but we ask You that You would use us as we seek its welfare with Gospel words, Gospel lives, and Gospel hearts that we might reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.