

DANIEL 1:1-2, #1 9-25-16

GOD'S WAY WITH HIS OWN

(Daniel 1) As I mentioned last Sunday, it seems to me that we are entering a period of history as the church in America, when we may find ourselves to be a marginalized and despised minority, living in a world in which godliness and Biblical wisdom lead us less and less into prosperity and more and more into persecution. For that reason, it seems the book of Daniel makes for a very fitting study as that is the context in which Daniel and his friends lived in Babylon, far away from the city of God, deep in a pagan culture with different values and different beliefs. My hope is that the Savior will use the Daniel stories to prepare us for faithfulness in the new America we will find ourselves in – whether that is an America led by Trump or Clinton.

Let's begin with a one question quiz. Who in Biblical history was Mishael? Does anybody know? How about Hananiah? Or Azariah? Ah-ha. This all goes to show how much we need to study the book of Daniel because you guys are ignorant of these wonderful biblical heroes that we read about in this prophetic book. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah all risked their lives to be faithful to God. They were men on fire for God and in the fire for God. Their story is found in Daniel chapter one and Daniel three. We begin today our study as a church of the book of Daniel. I expect to be here until Thanksgiving as we see what treasures of wisdom and understanding the Lord has deposited in this portion of His word. Let's begin this morning by reading Daniel **1-6** *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along 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 he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. 3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, 4 youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. 6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.*

What is it that they say we have learned from history? They say we learn from history that we don't learn from history. There is much truth to that. But our God is a God of hope. The Lord records a lot of history in His book for us with the expectation that we might learn from it and not be destined to repeat the hurtful mistakes of others. Blessed are those who learn from their mistakes, even more blessed are those who learn from the mistakes of others. You ten year olds who are watching your older brothers and sisters get in all kinds of trouble, learn from what you see. Don't make those same dumb mistakes. You learn from what you see in others and stay off restriction yourself. The Lord gives us in the history of His Old Testament people a number of great lessons about how He deals with His covenant people. This morning we will cover just the first two verses of Daniel, but there we see the way of God with His own. And we will look at three things we learn about how God dealt with Israel, because you can expect Him to deal in similar ways with you.

Verse one of the book sets the historical context. *1a In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.* Now Jehoiakim was not the last king of Judah, but he was close. His third year, this year when the king of Babylon came to pay him an unpleasant visit would have been 605 BC. Let's try to place that in the history of Israel. Here are some key Old Testament dates, some historical markers to hang your thinking on. Abraham lived when? We're not sure, but it was likely around 1900 BC. 1900 - Abraham. Moses led the people out of Egypt around 1280 BC. 1280 - Moses. David took office as king around 1000 BC. He would have been king at the change of the millennium which makes you wonder what he did to solve the Y1K problem when all the sundials got confused about what year it was. Anyway, here is another key date. In 930 the kingdom of Israel divided. The North was called Israel, the south was called Judah. One more date: 722 - the northern kingdom of Israel was obliterated by the Assyrians. 722 – the destruction of Israel. That brings us to our date 605 which began the exile of the Jews to Babylon. That exile was not complete, nor was it accompanied by the burning of Jerusalem until 586, but as we read, the process began in 605 when Nebuchadnezzar came from Babylon. Alright, there is your timeline and history lesson. Let's learn from history the ways of God beginning with...

The way of Sovereignty. When we say that God is sovereign we mean that He is in absolute control. And if there is any book in the Bible which maintains sovereignty as its major theme, it is the book of Daniel. We see it coming out right from the second verse. *2 The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along 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 he brought the vessels into the treasury of*

his god. That tells you what happened, but you'll notice that the first four words tell you why it happened. *The Lord gave. The Lord gave.* It was God's doing that Jehoiakim fell to the king of Babylon. Now certainly we could sit here and look at all the political causes and sociological causes and military causes, but the unknown writer of Daniel does what is common in the Bible and lays the whole thing in God's lap. When asked why Judah fell to Babylon the whole answer of Scripture is - God. God did it. It required a whole lot of decisions by a whole lot of people, including Nebuchadnezzar himself, but the effective and sufficient cause of what occurred was the Lord's choice to give Judah away. You see, you either give yourself to the Lord or He gives you to your enemies. God turned over His people, the chosen ones, to the hand of this idol-worshipping despot. When Habakkuk warned the people of what would happen he said Habakkuk 1:6 (NLT) *I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and violent people. They will march across the world and conquer other lands.* God said, "I am raising them up." The pagan nation would be responsible for what they did. They would have to answer to God for their treatment of Judah even though the Lord planned it. That blows my mind but it's true. God planned what Judas did to Jesus and what Babylon did to Judah and God then judges them for it. And He is just to do so. Habakkuk 1:11 (NLT) *They sweep past like the wind and are gone. But they are deeply guilty, for their own strength is their god.*" Babylon was to blame for what they freely did, an act of aggression planned out by God. So you see, it wasn't the way the dice rolled, it wasn't the positioning of the stars, it wasn't the superior military strength or strategies of the Babylonians. It was God.

How do you explain what occurs in this world? Perspective matters doesn't it? And perspectives differ. Remember this is a Jewish book. This is written from their perspective. Their holy city was besieged, their holy vessels plundered, their best and finest youth taken away, and who gets fingered as the cause? God does. How do you see the calamities in your life? I remember seeing a Barbara Walters interview with Christopher Reeve, the actor who had played Superman, about his fall from a horse that left him paralyzed. She asked him how he viewed his injury and he said, "Purely random chance." His wife said the same thing. No thought that God may have a purpose or a plan. No notion of destiny or fate. Pure happenstance is the view. Christians would not likely say that, but there are some inconsistencies among us about God's role. How does God relate to historical occurrences? Is He sovereign? Does He work all things according to the counsel of His will? TV preacher Fred Price says, "No way." He says and I quote, "*God has to be given permission to work in this earth...You are in control. So, if man has control who no longer has it? God...When God gave Adam dominion that meant God no longer had dominion. So, God cannot do*

*anything in the earth unless we let him.” Compare that statement with Daniel 4:**34-35b** “But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. 35 “All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven. We could duplicate that kind of statement from the word of God a dozen times or more. But we are reluctant to “blame” God as it were. We want to absolve God of any part in human pain and suffering, but the God of the Bible never seems to be bothered by it. When Job complained about God’s treatment of him, God never said, “Oh, Job, it’s not me doing that. I love you and would never hurt you. That’s the devil.” No, no. God took full credit for having sovereign control over Job’s fortunes. Daniel saw it that way too. In Daniel 9:**7** *Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day—to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You.* Did you catch what He said about their exile? He spoke of the countries to which God had driven them. Not the Babylonians, not the devil, not the winds of fate. Daniel says it was God who drove them there. We will see why God did in a moment, but for now let’s get clear on this. God did it. God is sovereign. Some view God as just another player in the course of history, but Scripture says He is the author. It really is HIS story. God has everything in control. That truth is perplexing to us in a world of disappointment, injustice and pain, since we know of His loving character, but anything other than a Sovereign Creator is absurdity and of no use or comfort to believers. We need to know that God has the whole world in His hands. James Russell Lowell in his poem, “The Present Crisis” wrote these immortal words, “Careless seems the great avenger; history’s pages but record, one death-grapple in the darkness twixt old systems and the word. Though the cause of evil prosper, yet the truth alone is strong; though her portion be the scaffold and upon the throne be wrong. Yet that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.” Belief in divine sovereignty is not belief in impersonal fate. Instead it affirms that our lives and our times are held in the hand of one who at great cost has become our Father, one whom we are privileged to address as Sovereign Father.*

As we examine the ways of God with His own we come secondly to the way of discipline. What is described in Daniel 1 is the initial thrust of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem. It was only the beginning of woes. The Babylonian king laid siege to the city but then was called home to be with

his dying father. He left Jehoiakim in charge, figuring he was a weak king but to insure he didn't misbehave Nebuchadnezzar took with him some hostages. In fact, he took the finest young people from among the royal family and the nobles. And then he took some stuff. Specifically he raided the temple and brought with him many of the vessels or instruments used in the worship of God. These would somehow indicate the triumph of the Babylonian god over Yahweh and would discourage the children of Israel. Basically, Nebuchadnezzar took their finest men and their finest treasures. He took the pride of Israel back to Babylon. And, whether you were one going to Babylon or left behind, this was painful. And it was perplexing. How could God let this happen? Oh sure, maybe Judah had not been living up to the commandments, but they were still better than those idolatrous Babylonians. This was Habakkuk's complaint. Habakkuk, the prophet, was bothered not so much by Judah's defeat as by Babylon's victory. Babylon represented the world, the dominion of Satan. Judah represented the living God. You would think God's team is going to win this game. You would think God would always let the best man win, but that ain't the way it is. Not by a long shot. It is agonizing for us to watch the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, but often that's the way it is. For now. A 100 years ago a mid-West corn farmer decided to prove there was no God. So he had a special field of corn that he only worked on Sunday when everybody else was in church. He did it to test God and when September arrived and the Sunday-farmed corn came out better than the rest He wrote a letter to the editor claiming he had disproven God. The editor responded to his letter by writing that God doesn't settle his accounts in September.

Sometimes God does let the wicked prosper for a season. It was God who gave the victory to Babylon, but listen my friend, Babylon was just a tool in his hand to discipline Israel his child. It was Judah God was concerned with. And he gave them over to Babylon as a form of national correction because they were His special, called, chosen people. Wow! Look at what God is doing with His chosen people Israel, His choice servant Daniel. As many have said, *Lord, if this is how you treat your friends, it's no wonder you have so few of them.* But what does Hebrews 12 say about this? Hebrews 12:**6-7** *For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?*

And when I look at the Old Testament to see how God disciplines I see that He doesn't just administer a few swats. God really lays the wood on the nation. But again, this is discipline. This has their best interest in mind. This is corrective, not vindictive. And this is what God does for His own. God may punish His enemies when they sin in this life. He may. But He will definitely punish

His children. Ruth Graham, Billy's wife, is famous for having said that if God doesn't bring judgment on the US he will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. That's a cutesy way of describing our national decadence but I hope you know it's not true. God is not obligated to destroy the US for its depravity and apostasy. I remember in the 1970s when there was so much talk among Christians about how God was going to judge our nation like He did Israel and Judah. And guess how God was going to do that? Back in the 70s the popular word was that God would judge us through the Russians. The Soviet Union's war machine would crush us because we were so evil as a society. Back then I remember thinking, "Hey, why wouldn't God destroy the Soviets for the evil in their society instead?" It seemed they were worse than we are. But the truth is that God isn't obligated to destroy the US or anyone else because we aren't His chosen people. Nationally speaking we are not the child of God like Judah was. Hebrews 12:8 (NLT) *If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all.* Fathers don't discipline kids that aren't theirs. But God told Israel in their infancy as a nation that if they rebelled against Him and forsook His authority and followed the ways of the nations that they would be driven from the land. And this was a promise of grace not wrath. God says to His chosen ones - I will not let you get away with sinning. I will punish you to break your heart and bring forth repentance. God's driving of Daniel and others into Babylon was a severe mercy. God is the God of severe mercy. He wounds us deeply at times to heal us fully.

And you know what? It really does hurt the Father as much as it hurts the children. That old parental line, "It hurts me more than it hurts you" is true. Hebrews 12 says that all discipline for the moment seems sad. That's so for the discipliner and the disciplinee. I believe God was grieved to see His people driven from their land. How do you think God felt to see the Babylonians desecrate His temple? The fame and reputation of Yahweh was diminished by what occurred. But still the Lord did it. I thought here of coaches of sports teams. They set rules for their players and then are faced with the painful choice of enforcing those rules when doing so could hurt the team's competitive chances. That has to be hard for a coach, to risk his record and reputation, but that is what God did to keep his word to Israel and break their pride. Have you experienced this personally? Have we experienced this as a church? You know, God had Solomon build Him quite a church there in Jerusalem. And because of their unfaithfulness He gave it to unbelievers. I heard this month that in England, in just the last five years, five hundred Church of England church buildings have been closed down and sold. They become night clubs or offices or mosques. Two per week in England. It troubles me greatly to think that this building, like so many wonderful

facilities around the world, will wind up in the hands of godless people someday because we neglect the word of God. May it never be. Pray that it would never be. Learn the lesson of history that God deals with His own in the way of discipline.

Thirdly, let's see that God deals with His own in the way of warning. Most people in authority try to practice this. Before you bring big judgment down on someone you alert them. The parent tells the child he is cruisin for a bruisin. The policemen warns the criminal to drop his gun. The referee warns a player he is on the edge of ejection. I appreciate that. When I coached basketball I would sometimes get on the refs about something and sometimes an official would say to me, "Coach, you have said enough. Time to shut it down." I usually appreciated the warning. The ref who does that is like a weary father saying to a child, "My patience is almost gone. You are at the line. Don't cross it." God did that with Judah. He warned them at the beginning of their national life. In Deuteronomy 28 God tells the people what will happen if they don't obey his commandments. Listen to some of this **32** *Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do.* Oh my. Is there anything more terrible? But that is what the parents of Daniel had to endure. **33-34** *A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually. 34 You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.* God didn't mince words did he? **41** *You shall have sons and daughters but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. 49 The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, 52 It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the Lord your God has given you.* The fulfillment of this warning we have read in Daniel chapter 1. But God was merciful to warn them so plainly. Not just once but many times and in many ways and thru many voices. God warned Judah in 722 BC. In that year God destroyed Israel, the northern kingdom. Israel ran away from God more rapidly than Judah. Judah had some good kings along the way, some periods of revival. Not Israel. Theirs was a fast track to destruction and they arrived a century before Judah. Assyria came in and wiped out their capital of Samaria, dragged the people away, scattered them among the nations and erased their name from the book of nations. You'd think Judah would learn from what happened to brother, but no. How sad is that?

God warned them through Moses, through the fate of Israel and then there were the prophets God sent to keep telling them how close they were coming to destruction. If you are taking notes this is the third way God warned Judah. Through Moses, thru Israel, thru prophets. To Judah alone God sent Isaiah, and Micah, and Zephaniah, and Habakkuk. The prophet Isaiah even told them this in 39:6-7 *'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the Lord. 7 'And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'*” Hello! Pay attention people! But no. They were dull and callous. But God was gracious to warn. That is His way. It was His way with Israel and Judah and it is His way with you. You have been warned by Moses. You know those commandment things He gave. Then He warned you through Jesus who said that if you don't repent of your sin and believe in Him you will perish. I expect God has warned you in other ways too, but I know for sure He is warning us today.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a great preacher of the last century in England. I have read many of his sermons and quoted him to you often. Shortly before his death he did an interview with Christianity Today and I remember they closed the interview by asking him to say whatever he wanted and this great man of God's final words were this quote from the gospels. "Flee the wrath to come." Those words made a deep impact on me. Deep impact? Hmm. There was a movie out once by that name wasn't there? It was about the end of the world coming from a large comet headed right at Earth and what some people do to escape it by means of a Noah's ark and a spaceship called *Messiah*. And my friend, if you are outside of Christ, there is a day coming for you, as there was for Judah, when the warnings stop. And the harsh reality sets in. *There really was a God to whom I was accountable. Moses wasn't kidding. Jesus wasn't kidding. That preacher wasn't kidding.* Don't let that day catch you unprepared. Flee the wrath to come by repenting of your sin and running to Jesus for grace and cleansing. If you would do that today sing our last hymn with me. Sing it from the heart to yourself and then speak to me, to an elder here, to a Christian you know who can help you find out more about the one real Messiah who came to save His people from their sins.