

Finding Joy in the Sovereign Rule of God

In my previous article from Daniel 1, we saw that the Old Testament people of Judah were severely punished for their flagrant and ongoing disobedience to God. This punishment, which came at the hands of the wicked Babylonians, began in 605 B.C. The invasion came in three waves. The Temple in Jerusalem was eventually destroyed and all the “vessels,” or “articles of the house of God” were captured and taken to Babylon. Going back to our text, it’s interesting that we’re told about the taking of “the vessels of the house of God” before we learn about the capture of Daniel and his three friends. Why is the taking of these “vessels” so important to the story?

Raiding the houses of worship of your enemies was common in Old Testament times. To understand this better, we’ll need to get some information from the book of 2 Kings. The event that I’m speaking of goes back about 100 years (approx. 703 B.C.) prior to where we are here in Daniel chapter 1. In chapter 20 of 2 Kings we learn that good King Hezekiah of Judah has become very sick, even to the point of death. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that he had better set his house in order and prepare to die. After Isaiah leaves, King Hezekiah prays fervently to God to spare his life. Later, God tells the prophet Isaiah to go back to the king and tell him that God has heard his prayer and seen his tears and that he’s been granted 15 more years of life. In addition to this, God also promises to *deliver Hezekiah from the hand of the king of Assyria*. The Assyrian king had been warring with Judah and was intent on taking Judah captive.

It’s about this time that another king—Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon *at that time* in Old Testament history, sends his envoys with “letters” and a gift to Hezekiah. The premise was to send well wishes to Hezekiah because he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. But the king of Babylon had another motive. The Hebrew word translated “letters” is a word that speaks of an official request. The king of Babylon had been warring with the king of Assyria himself and he was clearly hoping to gain an ally in King Hezekiah. The envoys from the king of Babylon come with letters and a gift and Hezekiah welcomes them. Although it wasn’t necessary to do this, *in his pride and foolishness*, Hezekiah shows the envoys the treasure house of Judah and all of the articles of value including, silver, gold, spices, and precious oil in his armory that God had provided for them. This prideful act was both *unnecessary and dangerous*. Not only would word get out as to how much treasure was in the storehouse of Judah, Hezekiah didn’t need to show the envoys his entire wealth in order to align Judah with the Babylonians in a war against Assyria. Sadly, even after God healed Hezekiah and promised him 15 more years of life, as well as promising that God, himself, would *deliver Judah from the Assyrians*, Hezekiah, places his hopes in a military alliance with a pagan nation rather than placing his trust in God. This proves to be a fatal choice for the people of Judah!

At this time Isaiah responds to the king with this prophecy from God. “Hear the word of the LORD. Behold the days are coming when all that is in your house and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD.

And *some of your own sons*, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Although the fullness of this prophecy would not be complete until after the second invasion (2 Kings 24:13), a portion of the vessels of the house of God are taken in the first invasion as we see here in verse 2. Keep in mind that, the king of Babylon at the time of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, knows nothing of this prophecy or God’s plan to use him to punish Judah. He believes that taking the vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem proves that his gods have defeated the God of Judah.

God is in absolute control of everything in life! This is a biblical teaching that we need to take to heart and find abundant joy in. This is a foundational truth that’s *as true for us today as it’s ever been!* Christians will struggle, at times, with many aspects of the culture in which we live today if we’re not holding tightly to this truth. Even though God is in control of all things, that doesn’t mean that we have no responsibility. But it does mean that we don’t have to fear. Even though we’re saddened by much that’s going on around us, we can rejoice that God is at work on behalf of the church! Although we can’t possibly know all that God is doing, the events recorded in the book of Daniel remind us that God is always in control and he always cares for his covenant people. Rejoice!

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