

Standing for Jerusalem in Babylon

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 February 2006

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, do turn up with me, if you would, the book of Daniel, chapter 1. Standing for Jerusalem in Babylon.

A couple of weeks ago, we began with an introduction to the book of Daniel, and we saw that it's a book about war and the winds of war. A war of the worlds, if you like, that's been raging from the very beginning of human history.

And the great relevance of the book for today is that it opens our eyes to the great realities about history and eternity, without which we cannot live as people of faith in our own age, or in any age for that matter.

We saw that from the setting of the book, in real time and history in the 6th century BC, that it gives us a window into human history, what it means to be the people of God in a hostile world.

But we saw from the very structure of the book itself that behind all human history is a heavenly story. The great story that is behind all stories.

[1 : 14] That there's a God in heaven who alone reveals and unravels the mysteries of this world that we live in. And who has power to overcome evil and who will establish a kingdom that lasts forever.

And it's that that explains and gives meaning to all of human history, and all that unfolds in our present day, in the world around us. We also saw that the subject of the book, Daniel, gives us a window into personal history.

What the life of faith looks like in this present world that is at war with its maker. What it means to know God and be strong and do exploits, as chapter 11 says.

And so to stand for God and to be used by God for his purposes. And tonight, as we look more carefully at Daniel chapter 1, the camera, as it were, zooms in from the cosmic to the personal. And it gives us, in a detailed way, the first picture of what it means to stand for God in a world that's at war with him. And as we're going to see, it's all about standing for Jerusalem in Babylon.

[2 : 32] And I think that there's no more urgent word that could be for God's people in our land today and in our day.

Just look again at the first couple of verses of Daniel chapter 1. Because the first thing that we've got to grasp about this war of the worlds, this great conflict that the book of Daniel paints so vividly for us, the first thing we've got to realize is that it will be a perennial battle.

A battle right until the very end of history. Here we are in the first couple of verses in the 6th century BC. God's city is destroyed.

His people have been crushed and are defeated. The world view of their faith has collapsed. God's actions appear to be so inexplicable that it is as though God himself is dead.

The outward leadership of God's people has capitulated utterly to the culture that has conquered the world. Babylon has triumphed over the kingdom of God.

[3 : 46] That's how it seems. That sounds very familiar, doesn't it? Clearly this is historical truth. It really happened. There's no doubt about that.

But it's so familiar to us because it represents something far greater. This perennial conflict. This perpetual conflict between two cities.

Babylon and Jerusalem. A battle that has raged from the very beginning of time. And will rage perennially until the very end of time.

Do you see in verse 2 that we're told that Nebuchadnezzar took them to Shinar. That's an archaic term.

It's not used very often in the Old Testament. But it refers to Babylon. If you go way back into Genesis chapter 11. Into the pre-history of the world. You find that it was on the plains of Shinar.

[4 : 44] That man in his pride and arrogance, his hubris. Said to himself, let us build for ourselves a city. And a tower that reaches to heaven. Let us make for ourselves a name for ourselves.

The city of Babel. With its tower. Proclaiming man is God in this place. That's the birth of Babylon. Babel. The city of man.

Proud and defiant. Usurping God himself. Seeking to control and to dominate the world. And as Babel and Babylon.

It symbolizes man's city. Man in rebellion against the God of heaven. The city of Babylon filled with the literature and language of the Chaldeans.

Of all that stands for the supremacy and the hubris. Of man flying in the face of the God of heaven.

[5 : 45] And God's people on earth have from the very beginning been of necessity. Strangers and aliens in this world. In this city that's against God.

In Genesis chapter 12. We read that Abraham was called out. Of just that kind of city. He's called out of Ur of the Chaldeans. And he's told to go.

To the place where God. Would show him. Of course Hebrews 11 tells us. That he lived as a foreigner. In tents. He was as a stranger. And an exile on this earth.

On this city of man. Because like all. The men of faith. He knew. That his home would never be in the city of man.

But only in the city with foundations. Whose architect and builder is God. They all acknowledged. These men and women of faith. That they would always be strangers and exiles on earth.

[6 : 44] Because they belong to a better country. To a heavenly one. So Hebrews 11.16. He says. Therefore God is not ashamed. To be called their God. For he has prepared for them.

A city. You see. Since the very beginning. Of the story of God's people. It's been just that. A tale of two cities. A city at war.

And raging with God. The city of man. Typified by Babylon. And a city of peace with God. And therefore hated by man.

The city of God. Jerusalem. And therefore there has been from the beginning. A perennial battle for the hearts and minds of men and women. Who are claimed by these two cities.

And captured either by the literature. And the language of the Chaldeans. Or by the literature and language of Zion. God's city. That's the story of human history.

[7 : 44] From the beginning. Right to the end. That's what's made clear to Daniel. In the dreams that he receives. That we looked at last time. Chapter 9.

Verse 26. Remember. We saw. That Daniel was shown. That to the end. There would be a great war. In chapter 10. Verse 2. He is revealed.

That it is to be a great conflict. And we're told. Daniel understood. And friends. We also must. Understand.

That. Or else. We'll never be able to understand. Anything at all. About the reality. Of our Christian life. Or. About the world. That we live in today.

And the world. That we will have to live in. Right. Until. The very end. It is a perennial battle. The city of man. Against.

[8 : 40] The city of God. But. And. This is. Also. Vital for us to know. It's a battle. Whose end shall come. And whose outcome.

Is not in doubt. Whatever the evidence. In this world. May seem to be. To the contrary. As we're going to see. When we get to chapter 9. God's. City.

Will be built. He has purpose. That it will triumph. He is building. A holy city. Daniel has shown. He's building it. Through the coming. Of his anointed one.

Who's going to atone. For sin. Who's going to bring in. Eternal righteousness. That's what Daniel's promised. God's city. Shall. Triumph. There is no shadow.

Of a doubt. And of course. We as New Testament. Christians. Look back. On the great. Fulfillment of that.

[9 : 35] In the Lord Jesus Christ. Victory is won. God has triumphed. And. God has triumphed. God has triumphed. But. We too. Don't we.

Await. A final consummation. A final end. To that conflict. When Jesus comes again. That's why.

When we get to the very end. Of the New Testament. To the book of Revelation.

Revelation chapter 12. Full of very. Similar. Kind of dreams. To what Daniel sees. Here in this book. we find that we're still seeing this same war because the end is not yet.

Do you remember Revelation chapter 12? Don't turn it just now but read it later on. It's a vision of a woman who gives birth to a man-child while the dragon, the devil, is prowling around seeking to devour.

And the man-child is caught up to heaven in triumph and in glory. And there's war in heaven and the devil himself is cast down and destroyed to the earth.

[10:36] But he's not yet utterly destroyed. The Son of Man triumphs but the devil goes to make war on the offspring of the woman, the church of Jesus Christ, right until the very, very end when at last the devil himself is destroyed forever and at last Babylon itself, the city of man, is utterly destroyed.

You see, right from the beginning of the Bible, right till the end, there is conflict. This is a perennial conflict for God's people in his world.

And it will be right to the very end. And if you think this is all a bit far-fetched and this kind of visionary and apocalyptic talk is worrying you a little bit, let me just be very plain and simple.

It's just what the Apostle Paul is talking about in Ephesians chapter 6, the very passage we read last Sunday where he says, Our battle is not against flesh and blood but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers in this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore, he says, take up the whole armor of God so that when the evil day comes, you will be able to stand firm. Stand, therefore. You see, that's what the life of faith has always been about from the beginning of time and it will be right till the end.

[12:10] Standing for the city of God in the midst of the raging of the city of man. Standing for Jerusalem in Babylon. That's what biblical faith means.

And that's what the book of Daniel is all about. How to stand for God in the midst of a hostile and alien and angry culture in a world that is at war with God.

And what we see in this book is a man, Daniel and his friends, clothing themselves with the armor of God so that they may stand. Clothing themselves with God's covenant, with His word of truth, with His purpose of grace.

So that in the evil day they are able to stand before kings and rulers and powers of this world of Babylon just because they have determined in all things first to stand for the King of Kings, to stand for the one true God of Heaven.

And friends, I suppose in this book of Daniel I am talking very especially to the youngest who are among us. Because if ever there was a book for young believers, it's the book of Daniel.

[13:33] Friends, this is where we are called to live today. In a world where Babylon has conquered Jerusalem. In a culture, in a society that has banished the God of Heaven and prostituted His sacred things on the altars of false and filthy gods of modern secularized society.

We are called to live here in times of war, in times of conflict, and it's a great conflict. It's a perennial one, and it will be till the end.

And we too, like Daniel, must understand the vision. We too must heed the message. It's a perennial conflict.

That brings us to the second thing, which really is the bulk of the story in this chapter in verses 3 to 16. Because this conflict is perennial, that clearly means that in every age and in every day, including our own, for every believer, this conflict will also be personal.

In every age and in our own lives, for all of us, there's a raging battle for the hearts and minds and souls of men and women and boys and girls, for whole generations of God's people.

[15:02] and a choice must be made. A choice to stand for Jerusalem, for the truth of the kingdom of God, and for the name of the God of heaven made known from heaven in Jesus Christ, our Lord, and nowhere else, and for the language and literature of Christ's kingdom and for the values of heaven, or to capitulate and to stand in Babylon and to succumb to the prevailing dominant and hostile but often very alluring and seductive culture of this world and to lose our hearts to the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

That's the stand. That's the choice that has faced men and women right from the very beginning of time and will face them until the last day. For Abraham, it was Ur of the Chaldeans with all its culture or it was living in a smelly old tent as a traveling Bedouin with God.

For Moses, it was the pleasures of Egypt or it was the contempt of Christ and his people. For Daniel and his friends, well, it was the alluring and dazzling onslaught of the empire that had captured the world and captivated the world with its culture.

And in each case, as it always is, the power and the pressure of the city of man is enormous. Power to drag away from the truth of God to worship a lie.

Power that promises everything but will deceive and in the end will only destroy everything and you with it. And we must be wise.

[17 : 09] and we must understand otherwise we too today are in terrible danger. The battle is personal for every Christian believer and every Christian church in our own day and if we don't see it, everything's lost.

And that's what was at stake here in Daniel chapter 1 with the cream of Israelite youth suddenly engulfed in a world of utterly foreign and hostile culture.

Do you see what's being described in verses 3 to 7? It's the world's bid for the mind. It's a systematic, sustained, takeover bid for the minds of God's people and for the heart and soul of a whole generation, a whole society.

They took the cream of the educated and the cultured youth and they systematically sought to program out of them everything to do with Jerusalem and replace it with everything to do with Babylon.

And it was oh so cleverly and subtly done. No brutality to raise rebellion and opposition, no. Rather, it was presented as the opportunity of a lifetime to learn, as verse 4 says, all the literature and language of the Chaldeans, all the vast culture and learning of a magnificent empire full of science, the cultural, the artistic, the triumphs of human civilization.

[18 : 43] And verse 5, to share in the rewards that go with that, to eat and drink from the very table of the king himself. Recognition, reward, public acclaim, fame and fortune.

These are very, very powerful forces, aren't they? In many ways, it must have been thrilling for these young men. Suddenly propelled from the stakes, from the backwoods of Judah, right into the center of the great city of the world.

Opportunities abounding to expand the mind. Learning and experience things they'd never dreamed of as possible before. so attractive, so rewarding, so stimulating, so exciting, you can just imagine.

But of course, the reality is that there was a subtle, oh so subtle, and sinister purpose behind all of that velvet glove of Babylonian finesse.

It's a determined program of assimilation. It aims to destroy every last vestige of the ways of God and his city and replace it entirely with a holy new world view, a holy and completely foreign identity.

[20 : 12] That's why we're told in verse 7 that all of their names were changed. All their names, each one containing part of the name of the God of Israel, Yah or El, replaced with names that contained parts of the names of Babylonian gods.

The whole three-year process was planned and orchestrated and measured so as to gently lull along these Israelites, to transform their whole way of thinking so that all their former identity was gone and they hardly would even notice that anything had happened.

through the patient but poisonous winning of their minds. But you see, the battle for the mind is really a battle for the heart, for the whole soul, for the will, for the conscience.

It's not just an intellectual thing at all. No. It's a moral battle for the heart of these men, for their whole beings. Because if you change somebody's way of thinking, you change the way they act. You change the whole attitudes that make up their hearts. You change what they are in their innermost being. And that's what's going on in this deeply personal attack on these young Hebrew men's very identity as the people of God.

[21 : 39] It's assimilation from Jerusalem to Babylon, from the city of God to the city of man. We don't have to look very far back in our own recent history, do we, to see evidences of exactly the same kind of thing.

Just think of Germany in the 1930s, the systematic program of the Hitler youth to win the hearts and minds of a whole generation of young people who are systematically deceived.

the result was the horror of a Nazi empire that came within a whisker of dominating the whole world.

We've seen it in the Soviet empire with the young communists where young boys and girls and teenagers were so possessed by the communist party that they would spy and eavesdrop on their homes and their parents, even sometimes seeing them sent to the gulag camps for the sake of the party.

We've seen it in communist China, even to the present day. We've seen it recently, haven't we, in the appalling manipulation that there seems to have been of the minds of young men and even women now to turn them into suicide bombers, people who would blow themselves up and destroy other people.

But friends, do not think that we in the West, in our country, have been exempt from all of this.

[23 : 18] Do not think that the language and literature of the Chaldeans has not had its sway among us or in our society or even in the church of God in the West.

It's rampant all around us. But perhaps, perhaps we've been engorging ourselves so much in the unparalleled prosperity of the post-war years, of the king's meat and drink, that we've been sleepwalking ourselves into Babylonian ways without really realizing what's going on.

But Daniel chapter 1 says to all of us, wake up! Look at the power of the forces at work in our society today.

the language and literature of the Chaldeans, the pagan and secular opposition to the God of Heaven is everywhere around us.

There are concerted campaigns going on for the hearts and minds of our society, especially the young and the able and the intelligent.

[24 : 29] our whole society has been ripped away from everything that rooted and founded it. The foundations of biblical morality that our law and justice system rested upon, that our whole attitude to medicine and the arts and everything else, it's being systematically dismantled by powerful coordinated forces of secular humanism.

Everything arrayed against the city of God and against God Himself. We see it everywhere. We see it in the power of the media, not just in the news and television and radio, but in film, in theater, in advertising, I suppose above all today on the Internet.

We see it in education. How do you think, for example, that a tiny but very powerful pro-homosexual lobby has made such huge advances in just a few short years so that it's totally transformed the whole values of our society where things once understood universally as perversity are now commonly accepted as absolutely normal?

even in the professing church of God. How has that happened? Well, the answer, of course, is simple. Focus on the young, on the impressionable, in education, in our schools.

Teach our children the language and literature of the Chaldeans. That's what's been done, hasn't it? Same for other aspects of sexuality.

[26 : 13] contraception and abortion and euthanasia and all sorts of other things. We see it in our universities and colleges where there is a concerted influence of secular thinkers pouring scorn on traditional morality and ethics and promoting a soulless amorality where there is no truth and there are no absolutes and everything and anything is tolerated except a belief and a commitment to absolute truth, the truth of God and an absolute morality that bows to Him.

And our society has changed in a few short decades. It's changed in an absolutely astonishing way. Isn't that true? This is a nation that is now unrecognizable from the Britain that emerged 50 years ago from the Second World War.

But, and this is the terrifying thing. We've got so used to it, we just don't seem to notice it anymore. And the Church of God, like most of Daniel's colleagues and friends who quite happily seem to go along with everything that was offered, including the leaders of God's people, the Church of God has been virtually assimilated into the world.

And more and more we've accepted the literature and language of the Chaldeans as normative in our thinking, and in our behavior we have been assimilated. So that to stand for truth of Scripture on issues today such as marriage or sexuality or the uniqueness of Christ gives you immediately the label fundamentalist, fanatic, out of the mainstream, in the same league as suicide bombers and the like.

just as those who protest about the profanity and the vulgarity and the filth in our media meet themselves with howls of derision from the liberal intelligentsia.

[28 : 33] It all began with a battle for the mind turning the truth of God into a lie and inevitably that affects hearts and wills and consciences and our whole being.

Do you remember Psalm 1? If you begin standing in the counsel of the wicked soon you'll be walking in the way of sinners and very quickly you'll be settled in the seat of scoffers.

what once was shameful you're not only doing but you're celebrating. Listen to this from a journalist in the United States quoted in a book by Ravi Zacharias called Deliver Us From Evil.

She says this We've all had a moment when all of a sudden we looked around and thought the world's changing. I'm seeing it change. This is for me the moment when the new America began. I was at a graduation ceremony at a public high school in New Jersey. It was 1971 or 72. One by one a stream of black-robed students walked across the stage and received their diplomas and a pretty young girl with red hair big under her graduation gown walked up to receive hers.

[29 : 49] The auditorium stood up and applauded. I looked at my sister she's going to have a baby. The girl was eight months pregnant and had the courage to go through with her pregnancy and take her finals and finish school despite society's disapproval.

But society wasn't disapproving. It was applauding. Applause is right and generous response for a young girl with grit and heart and yet in the sound of that applause I heard a wall falling.

A thousand year wall a wall of sanctions that said we as a society do not approve of teenaged unwed motherhood because it's not good for the child not good for the mother and not good for us. The old America had a delicate sense of the difference between the general we disapprove and the particular let's go and help her. We had the moral self-confidence to sustain the paradox to sustain the difference between official unapproval and unofficial sucker.

the old America would not have applauded the girl in the big graduation gown but some of its individuals would have helped her not only materially but with some measure of emotional support.

[31 : 02] We don't do that so much anymore. For all our tolerance and talk we don't show much love to what used to be called girls in trouble. As we've gotten more open-minded we've gotten more closed-hearted.

Message to society. What you applaud you encourage. Watch out what you celebrate. Isn't that our society?

More open-minded yes but in reality much more closed-hearted. Why? Because we are increasingly devoid of the truth of God and therefore we are dehumanizing the very image of God that we as humans bear.

Zacharias goes on and says this in an unbelievable and shocking turn of events we have moved from speaking out against certain moral choices to being pressurized by political enforcement and the so-called tolerant cultural elite not only to accept what was once disapproved of but to celebrate it.

Allowance for people to determine their own moral destinies has been supplanted by the demand that even that which may be repugnant or offensive to one's moral sensitivities must be acclaimed and glorified.

[32 : 24] Celebrating the literature and the language of the Chaldeans. and that is the inevitable consequence of allowing the mind of allowing our thinking that was once rooted in the city of God in the truth of God to be deceived and assimilated into Babylon into the city of man.

and none of these Israelites seemed to see it except these four men. And no doubt they were scorned and sneered at by their peers.

Even the leadership of God's people seemed to have capitulated utterly. You can just hear them saying it Daniel and that crowd those wretched fundamentalists they're so awkward when are they going to learn to grow up for the sake of the peace of the whole church.

We're a broad church you know we're the church of Babylon now. But they saw the danger and they determined not to budge because despite the world's bid for their minds they understood God's claim on their hearts.

And verses 8 to 16 show their refusal to fall in love with that new world. Verse 8 says literally Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself.

[33 : 58] He saw that the issue at stake was his very heart and soul. And he determined that Babylon would never ever possess his heart because his heart belonged to one alone the God of heaven.

And so on this issue of food he would not bend. He would not compromise. The scholars are divided over the significance of this issue of food.

It may be that it was to do with the food having been offered to idols. Well it seems likely that the vegetables that they would eat would also have been offered to such idols.

But whatever the specifics of this issue and we can't be sure we can be sure of this for Daniel this was a line in the sand he would not cross.

He could not do otherwise because if he did he would have defiled himself. He would have dishonored God. And so in the end it was an issue of idolatry or true worship.

[35 : 00] it was about whether he would bow down to Babylon and everything that it stood for or bow down only to the God of Israel the God of heaven.

And to preserve his heart there was this thing that he would not do because to refuse to make a stand would be to capitulate totally to this world and all that it stands for.

And so as we read in verse 11 he was polite he was careful he was wise in handling himself he wasn't brash he wasn't irritating he wasn't self-promoting there's no need to offend people unnecessarily when they can't understand what we're doing but he was firm he was unmovable and he was risking his life.

There was no guarantee of the outcome that we see just as in chapter 3 when the three friends refused to bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar there's no guarantee that God will save him and even if God will not save us they said we will not bow down to Babylon and its ways.

And so here these men denied themselves the king's meat and drink. It's just a biblical principle of fasting you know denying yourself to teach yourself and to keep teaching yourself that it's God alone who rules and directs your life.

[36 : 34] It's not by the bread of this world alone that you prosper and thrive but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And their stand you see was decisive.

Their stand was what anchored them was what tethered them in God's city. It planted their feet once and for all in Jerusalem.

And that was what gave them the power to live in Babylon but not be part of Babylon. To live as we must in an alien and a foreign and a hostile culture.

To study it. To understand it. To penetrate it. But never to belong to it. Never to be owned by it. Never to celebrate it.

to do that there must be some things that we must refuse. Some lines we will not cross.

[37 : 35] Some places we will not go because that is what keeps our heart in God's city and keeps us reserved for God alone.

And to Daniel and the others they denied themselves this food. Perhaps it was something entirely innocent in itself. But they did it to make a stand. They fast to remind themselves that they are God's men in enemy territory.

They are not civilians collaborating with the enemy. They are not free to act as they would be in peacetime living a life of ease and rest. No.

They are in a fight for the very survival of the kingdom of God and the promise of God. That was what was at stake and they knew it. They understood it. And friends, if we in the West, if we in this country of ours, look at the church of Jesus Christ and mourn over its pathetic state, and it is in a pathetic state in this country of ours, is it not?

Three quarters of the parishes in our church of Scotland unable to even support themselves financially. The public leadership of so much of our church utterly capitulated to the culture of Babylon.

[39 : 03] But if we see that, we must ask ourselves this, have we been willing to make a stand? The kind of stand that alone will prevent us losing our hearts and souls to the engulfing culture of this world.

Is there anything in your life and in mine that we are prepared to take such a stand on? To draw a line in the sand and say, thus far, but no further?

It seems to me that that kind of thinking is almost totally foreign in modern day evangelicalism. So beguiled have we become by the culture of Babylon?

So enticed by the king's meat? Here's another quotation from a writer, speaking about the many Christians that he's known who have fallen away through sin of all kinds, especially sexual sin, especially the many, many temptations of the culture of this world.

He says this, what happens to such people? It seems to me that our society is more threatening to our sanctity than it has been for many generations. Worldliness has never been such a problem for the people of God.

[40 : 23] The king's food is a real temptation as we're enticed by the affluence and the values of our pagan environment. Many, like Demas, finish up departing, haven't fallen in love with the present age.

Daniel's scruples may seem to have been over a very small matter, but if we do not draw the line somewhere, if we do not make a stand on something, then we find ourselves legitimizing our involvement in the world to an unacceptable degree, and the resulting slide may be dreadful and disastrous.

us. And if I tell you that the man who wrote those words was once a herald, unparalleled almost, of the gospel in this country, today has left his wife and family and is living in a homosexual affair with another man, doesn't that make it all the more chilling?

Is there anything in your life that you are prepared to take such a stand on?

How different to think back of that film that was in vogue 20 years ago, Chariots of Fire, the great story of Eric Little, who was a boyhood hero to me and to others perhaps of my generation, the man who refused to run in that Olympic race on a Sunday?

[41 : 51] It struck me as I was thinking about this, that it's far more likely today in evangelical circles to hear that kind of thing being ridiculed. Legalism, misguided Sabbatarianism, we are free, we don't need to do that.

Well, that is just symptomatic of the kind of shallow and feeble and feckless Christianity that is failing to make any impact whatsoever on our postmodern generation.

It was nothing to do with legalism and Sabbatarian bondage to do what Eric Little did, but it was everything to do with the spirit of Daniel.

He said in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of his peers and in the eyes of the Olympic Committee, I will not defile myself because the God of heaven means more to me than every gold medal there's ever been.

And I will not bow the knee to anyone other than him. Here I stand. and that's just what Daniel and his friends did.

[43 : 09] To anything that you or I are actually willing to give up or to make a stand on like that, where we're willing publicly to say, no, that I will not do, that place I will not go because the God of heaven means more to me than all that I would gain besides.

That's the spirit of a man who stands for Jerusalem in Babylon. That's the martyr spirit that has been the power of the church from the beginning right to the end.

But alas, it seems so absent in our western Christianity today. But where men will honor God as these men did, God is no man's debtor.

Them that honor me, I will honor God says. And he vindicates that kind of stand, whether it's Eric Little and his other gold medals, or whether it's Daniel in verse 9, to whom God gave favor and compassion in the sight of his captors, made them prosper on their water and vegetables.

You see, this is the God of heaven who rules empires, but he's also the God who's near to his own. He's the one who's near to those who call on him in truth.

[44 : 36] And he hears and he honors the prayer of faith. And he will bless every stand that's made for him.

Not always bringing physical deliverance. Many with the martyr spirit have indeed been martyred. but always honoring in his kingdom the stand of those who stand alone for his kingdom.

And don't forget that big picture, that big story that the book of Daniel is a part of, the story of God's unfolding kingdom, the salvation of God's people.

people. Because that you see, explains his prospering of these men here in this particular place. Verses 17 to 21 remind us that the conflict that we are part of is not just perennial, nor is it just personal.

It is a conflict with a purpose. God has a purpose for these four men. It's not just Daniel's story, it's not just the story of his three friends, not just Nebuchadnezzar's story, it's God's story.

[45 : 47] It's a story of his plan and purpose effortlessly unfolding under his control. Even when it seems that Babylon has conquered Jerusalem. Not so.

No. God is in command. Just as God had the whole exile under his control. Just as God controlled everything surrounding Daniel and his friends.

In verse 17 we're told God gave them wisdom and understanding standing. And God gave Daniel interpretation of dreams. It speaks of the many dramas to come.

It speaks of their crucial role in the unfolding purpose of God. There's echoes of Joseph. Remember everything seemed to be wrong and against but God was with Joseph. God sent him in advance for the saving of many lives. God God is going to use Daniel and his friends in his unfolding purposes.

[46 : 47] God loves to share his glorious purposes with his saints. He loves to use them. He loves to use men and women of Jerusalem who will stand in Babylon.

And he blesses these men for that purpose. for his kingdom in the midst of that pagan city. Daniel himself plays a crucial role for six or seven decades.

And friends, it's God's pattern to use his people to do great things for his kingdom through their faithful stand. In the midst of the battles and the struggles and the inevitable things that there will be in this world, God is using your stand.

For his almighty purposes of grace in the world. He doesn't want his people to hide away in holy huddles or in monasteries or throwing up their hands in horror at the state of the world.

No. He wants his people to stand. To stand for him in the city of man. To stand in Babylon but for Jerusalem.

[48 : 01] Because every such stand is for a purpose. It's for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's for the glory of his kingdom which shall be forever.

Friends, I do hope that encourages you in the struggles that you face with the world, the flesh, the devil. It's not a purposeless battle that you're caught up in.

It's a battle with a wonderful purpose for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. In your life, as Jesus lives in you, in our church, as Jesus lives through us.

That's why he says to us, friends, dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to stand for Jerusalem in the midst of Babylon.

Because God always, always, honors such a stand. Yes, there will be war, struggles, and conflict to the bitter end.

[49 : 16] Yes, it will be for you, for every believer who wants to live a godly life. It will be deeply personal and often deeply painful. The dragon went off to wage war with all the offspring, the church of Jesus Christ, but they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and the power of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even to death.

Your stand has a purpose. We are part of the glorious advance of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ as his gospel goes out into the world.

That's his plan. And that gospel is the power of God for salvation of men and women and boys and girls in a dark world.

And your stand today in the 21st century and my stand and our stand as a church refusing to defile ourselves in the face of the overwhelming pressures of Babylon might be the only thing that keeps that light of God's truth burning so that anyone can see and can find that saving truth that's in Jesus.

We must stand. But standing costs. To stand for Jerusalem in Babylon may cost us everything.

[50 : 43] but that's what it means to be a Christian to stand for Jerusalem and Babylon.

That's the claim of the city of God on your mind your heart your conscience your very being. Well may God help us to help one another to make that stand for Christ and his kingdom.