

Whiner, Worker, Witness, or Wonder?

Lessons learned from Ezekiel & Daniel

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We know hard times will come

- The question is, How do we respond?
- Two characters in the Old Testament, Ezekiel and Daniel, whose stories started when they were teenagers give us some encouraging examples

In the midst of unimaginable challenges, we'll see how.....

- They didn't whine
- They faithfully worked
- Their lives became a witness
- The wonder of God was then revealed to and through them
- Our lesson today will show you how this happened!

The setting—time has run out

- After hundreds of years of warning and challenges, **it's over for Judah.**
- Like Israel before them, they are about to be conquered and deported from their land
- Last week we looked at how Habakkuk questioned how God could use a nation, Babylon, who was as bad as Assyria to do the punishing
- And how God answered him that He had it all under control
- Habakkuk trusted him and now we'll see how others reacted

Even during this final judgement

- While Habakkuk was praying and questioning, God sent Jeremiah to preach to the people and to tell them that they needed to submit to the Babylonian conquest
- The two men we are talking about today did just that and God used them IN THE MIDDLE OF great challenges not only for their good, but as a witness to others.
- Let's look at their stories briefly (these books can be the source of massive studies) and plus discuss applications we can learn from.

Historical overview of events

- Babylon's conquest of Judah was in 3 parts1. Neco (Necho), king of Egypt, came up out of Egypt to make war at Carchemish. Josiah, king of Judah, went out to stop him. 609 BC. (35:20).
- 2. **Josiah** was wounded in battle and was returned to Jerusalem where he **died**. 609 BC. (35:24).

- 3. **Jehoahaz**, his son, was placed on the throne and reigned **three months**. 609 BC. (36:1,2).
- 4. Neco took him into Egypt and replaced him with Jehoiakim. 609 BC. (36:4).
- 5. **Jehoiakim reigned eleven years**. 609-598 BC. (36:5).
First deportation: Daniel and friends were included in this –Teenagers at the time
- 6. **Nebuchadnezzar came up against him and bound him in chains to carry him to Babylon. 598 BC. (36:6).**
- 7. **Nebuchadnezzar took 'some of the vessels' of the temple to Babylon. 598 BC. (36:7).**
- 8. Jehoiachin was made king and reigned three months. 598-597 BC. (36:9).
Second Deportation: Ezekiel taken to Babylon at this time.—very young also when it happened
- 9. At the turn of the year Nebuchadnezzar returned, captured Jerusalem and **replaced Jehoiachin with Zedekiah. Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon** 'with the vessels' from the temple. 597 BC. (36:10).
- 10. **Zedekiah reigned eleven years**. 597-586 BC. (36:11).
- 11. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. 588 BC. (36:13). (**a really stupid thing to do**)
Final Deportation:
- 12. The Lord brought against them the king of the Chaldeans who killed the young men with the sword in the sanctuary and had no compassion on young or old. They were all given into his hand. 586 BC. (36:17).
- 13. 'All the articles' of the house of God, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and his officers, he took to Babylon. 586 BC. (36:18).
- 14. **He burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned its fortified buildings. 586 BC. (36:19). **Zedekiah saw his officers and family slaughtered, then blinded and taken as a captive**

Setting overall for both men

- Policy of Babylon—somewhat different than others who primarily killed and resettled
- Intentionally took as captives the leaders and young potential leaders of a nation
- Removed them to the Babylonian empire and trained them
- This removed chance of rebellion and increased the strength of the Babylonian empire
- Turned the captives into skilled civil servants instead of rebellious slaves
- The system worked well

But what about Daniel and Ezekiel?

- System sounds interesting, but how did it work out for real people
- We are going to look at 4 ways of responding for Daniel and Ezekiel and how they handled it

Options:

Whiner, Worker, Witness, Wonder

#1 Whining

A natural response....why me?

False assumptions when bad things happen include:

God hates me, is punishing me, this is a disaster

ALL of these are often WRONG!

Job—great example of the most greatly honored of God

Habakkuk—we see that we are sometimes caught up in a bigger picture of God's plan—but the assurance that the individual can trust God no matter what the situation

We feel we have a right to complain—but we DON'T
God is God, we are his creation—He can do what He wills

Antidote to WHINING

Habakkuk's lessons: cry out to God, but then humbly wait for his answers

How did Ezekiel and Daniel respond?

They submitted to their situation—we don't ever see them whining

Or refusing to do what God asked them to do

Plenty of examples of those God called complaining about it—but it never works—we need to learn from their lessons

Much better to simply obey

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky Phil. 2:14-15

Be filled with hope and expectation—We never know what might be next....Don't quit too soon

And you may miss out on something WONDERFUL!
2 stories

On the road to Emmaus—Jesus resurrected; meets two on the road discussing his death, great statement, "It's been 3 days, they said.

But in a short time, they would recognize the Lord who had been with them all along

Bear Grylls story of not quitting too soon

#2—With hope and trust in God

Discover the WORK you are given in it

Both got to work and did their jobs—which we will discuss in a bit

There is always something to do—something positive, something God-ordained, no matter what
Eternal perspective gives meaning to all work—

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

C. S. Lewis

Daniel and his friends became civil servants

And they became best at their jobs

It began when they were first in training, they asked to not eat the king's food

Story of Daniel asking politely and for a test

Daniel 1:13-20:¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and

water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom.

God given, but they had to apply what they'd been given—more in a minute

Ezekiel was a priest, became a prophet

Of a priestly family, taken to Babylon

Daniel at the palace, Ezekiel among the people

Called to special prophetic ministry at 30,

extraordinary vision of the glory of God

Ezekiel 2:3-7 He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. ⁴ The

people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says.' ⁵ And whether they listen or fail to listen—for they are a rebellious people—they

will know that a prophet has been among them. ⁶ And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. ⁷ You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious

Preached about 20 more years--more on him in a bit

As result of no whining and working they became a WITNESS—

People came to them

If you are faithful—situations will come up—not always again the most pleasant

Daniel and friends

Daniel has the opportunity to tell the king not only the meaning, but the content of his dream of the large statue representing Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdoms that will come after him

But then his power goes to Nebuchadnezzar head and he wants to be worshipped

Daniel's friends—fiery furnace

Daniel 3:17-18 *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

One more thing—they were not alone in the fire
Daniel 3:25 He said, **"Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."**

This was what was known as a "theophany" a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity--Jesus

Remember Jesus promises to be with us ALWAYS

Continuing in Daniel—Interesting little story in Dan.

4—Nebuchadnezzar gives his testimony

"First gospel track"

Daniel 4:1-3 King Nebuchadnezzar,

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:

May you prosper greatly!

² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

³ How great are his signs,
how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;

his dominion endures from generation to generation.

The story—a dream, pride, lives like an animal, restored to sanity when humbled himself before God

Daniel continues to be faithful

Nebuchadnezzar's son does not follow his father in serving God

In the midst of a drunken party a hand appears and writes on the wall

Daniel 5:25-28 *"This is the inscription that was written:*

mene, mene, tekel, parsin

²⁶ *"Here is what these words mean:*

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

²⁷ ***Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.***

²⁸ ***Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."***

Daniel is called in, interprets the writing

That night Babylon falls

Now another huge political upheaval

Daniel continues to serve

Life goes on, the new king comes in and Daniel is once again part of the government

Daniel 6 *It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."*

Result Daniel In the Lion's Den

He was an old man then—one would think he'd been through enough—but no retirement for God's people

In the Lion's Den

Daniel 6 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

²¹Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! ²²My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

²³The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

The book now shifts from the witness to his life to the wonder of revelations, but first what was happening with Ezekiel

Elijah as a witness

He was called to be a watchman (passage repeated twice c. 3 & 33)

Ezekiel 33:7 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸When I say to the wicked, 'You wicked person, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade them from their ways, that wicked person will die for^[a] their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ⁹But if you do warn the wicked person to turn from their ways and they do not do so, they will die for their sin, though you yourself will be saved.

He preached to the captives and also to surrounding nations of God's judgement

And what a watchman he was!

The situation: the people in Babylon were in captivity because of their sin

But they didn't accept it—they keep asking for deliverance from their situation and that Jerusalem be spared

So Ezekiel is called to remind them of the sins that brought them where they are (some messages in rather graphic gross details)

And that God was going to judge them for it AND the surrounding nations would be judged also He did this in a variety of ways—an extremely creative

Preached, counseled, answered questions

Many living sermon illustrations: acted out the siege, ate famine food, didn't speak, wife died and could not mourn

Lesson—sometimes people simply will not learn or listen to God

As a listener—don't let that be you—believe God even if you don't understand or don't like it

As a teacher and as any disciple—keep on living how you should; if called to teach, keep teaching a biblical message, no matter what the response

God used his life to teach his lessons and he continues to do that

^{2 Cor 1: 3} Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. ⁶If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. ⁷And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Don't judge others for what they are going through—pray they will accomplish God's purposes Don't worry about being weird or judging you—people will think you are strange and YES you are—you don't fit into the world's mold PLAY to the audience of ONE—God only

Finally the Wonder

Both given glorious visions

Ezekiel—after the tragedy of the glory departing the temple, in the final chapters of the book He sees the vision the wonder of the renewed, eternal temple

That would not have come if he had not been faithful in not whining, in working, in witnessing Are the descriptions of the Temple literal or allegorical?—no definite answer—

An earthly analogy—no description prepares you for what the Grand Canyon actually looks like I imagine much of heaven and final events will be like that—we think we know, but the reality will be so much more

Regardless of our understanding or not, he prophesied a glorious future and the book ends with:

Ezekiel 48:35

"And the name of the city from that time on will be: the Lord is there."

Daniel

He lived through the entire story of captivity and return

Dan 6:24 “prospered during the reign of Darius, Cyrus”

Saw all that had been prophesied come true, from deportation to return

His prophecies are about both the near future of his people (some really easy to understand, e.g. of Alexander)

Ones of the coming of Jesus, years to the day of when he would appear

And of the far future—not so easy, many interpretations

But message over all—God is in control, now and forever

A final word to us

Daniel 12:3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Wise= “sakar” a word comprising those who know God’s Word and live according to it

Who lead many to righteousness—not whining, being a worker and witness wherever you are, you will see and reflect the wonder of serving God

And His promise to many of you who are wise, who study His Word, work to live by it and through your lives and prayers work to lead many to righteousness

You will shine like the stars forever and ever!