

The Prophets Ezekiel and Daniel

Worker, Whiner, Witness, and Wonder

Your Notes

What to expect in this lesson

- Ezekiel and Daniel are two of the most discussed, dissected, and debated about prophets.
- They are a favorite of prophecy buffs who spend tremendous amounts of time attempting to find the exact analogies today of the images in them and the timelines of events, piecing together a complicated prophecy puzzle.
- If that is what you were expecting, sorry.....
- ***That is not the approach we are going to take.***
- In our next lesson on Haggai and Zechariah, I'll have an extended discussion on prophetic images and the challenge of extracting current meanings from them.
- But in this one, and it is certainly no judgement of anyone who is into more traditional prophecy studies, but.....

What our focus is to be about now—is what it seems Jesus was quite clear about in 2 places—

- *Matt.24:36, But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. . . .⁴⁵ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? ⁴⁶ It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.*
- *Acts 1:6-8, MSG When they were together for the last time they asked, “Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time? He told them, “You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.”*
- **Our focus is not to be about date-setting or trying to figure out what is impossible to know—we are to be about faithfully doing the work He has given us to do, caring for those He’s given us to care for, sharing the Good News however we can—in summary, being His witness now in the assurance of our eternal future with Him.**
- **We win....so get to work!**

Some of the modern messages we’ve clearly seen repeated again and again in the prophets

- Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God when He delivered them from Egypt and they promised to do all He commanded at that time.
- Though His commands were many, the two foundational ones were to love God and love people.
- Loving God involved worshipping and serving Him only.
- Loving people involved caring for the poor, widows, orphans, and aliens and all that involved in maintaining a just and fair society.
- ***Application reminder—our command is to do the same—don’t get so distracted with prophecy puzzles you ignore obvious contemporary commands on serving God and serving “the least of these.”***
- The prophets as “covenant enforcement communicators” were sent to them for hundreds of years to remind them of what they promised, and what God also promised if they did not repent of their disobedience...
- And because they didn’t do as they promised to do, after repeated warnings...

Time has run out for Judah—

- After hundreds of years of warning, challenges, watching what happened to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, when they were conquered by Assyria and the warnings of many prophets, ***it’s over for Judah.***

- ***Babylon has risen in power and conquers the entire area from Assyria to Egypt.***
- As part of an early deportation, when Babylon first exerted control over Judah, Daniel and Ezekiel are taken to Babylon.
- It must have seemed horrible, yet they were deported to Babylon in a relatively peaceful way.
- They were kept from the later horrors of the siege, the total destruction of Jerusalem, and the more harsh final deportation.
- Daniel and his 3 friends were taken to the palace.
- Ezekiel was relocated with the captive people, near the river.
- This lesson is on how God greatly used them both—

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

- Daniel and Ezekiel didn't ***whine***.
- They faithfully ***worked***.
- Their lives became a ***witness***.
- And then the ***wonder*** of God was revealed to and through them.
- This lesson will show you how this happened in their lives and uncover the modern messages for us in it.
- We may not be taken captive to a foreign land, but we all will have challenging times, and we always have options as to how we respond.

The setting overall for both men in Babylon

- The Policy of Babylon—was somewhat different than other conquerors who primarily killed and resettled—remember what happened with Assyria and Samaria.
- Instead, Babylon intentionally took as captives the leaders and young potential leaders of a nation.
- They removed them to the Babylonian empire, trained them, and gave them positions of trust and honor.
- This removed the chance of rebellion from talented potential leaders and increased the strength of the Babylonian empire.
- The policy turned the captives into skilled civil servants instead of rebellious slaves.
- ***Application—if you are the “winner” in any situation, always be gracious, welcoming, inclusive. Everyone benefits from this.***

The system worked well

- The common people were settled in places where they had their own homes, gardens, and as we can see in later years, they prospered and did well financially.
- So much so that when the chance to return to their homeland came, many preferred to stay in Babylon (at least for a time—until the threatened extinction at the time of Esther changed that).
- Many were so wealthy they were able to give generously to the rebuilding of the temple.
- ***Application—you never know How God will work at the start of a seeming disaster—which is what this lesson will go on to illustrate.***

A focus on two of them—Daniel and Ezekiel

- The Babylonian 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—how they might have responded and then what they did, and of course what we can learn from them.
- When any difficulty comes, our options of responding are that we can become a.....
- Whiner, Worker, Witness, Wonder

#1 Whining

- A most common and natural response to any trouble...why me?
- Here are some false assumptions we might have when bad things happen:
- *God hates me, is punishing me, this is a disaster.*
- ALL of these are most likely wrong ***because even if we are being disciplined for a sin***

(as the entire nation was) God always has our best in mind and He is in control.

- AND He often not only makes a situation tolerable; God can make it better than we can imagine.
- Whining makes us look petty and is a bad reflection on the God we claim to serve and trust and our stated faith in Him.

A modern-day example, who didn't whine

- At the Global Leadership Summit, a featured speaker was Jamie Kern Lima, a woman who started out as a waitress at Denny's, worked hard, went to college, got her dream job as local news anchor and then developed Rosacea, a skin condition that would cause her face to break out in big red blotches.
- She lost her job as a news anchor, but she didn't whine, she believed God wanted her to start a cosmetics line for people like her, who had Rosacea—after many years, 100 hr. weeks, huge challenges and when down to \$1,000 in the bank (total personally and as a business), after years of rejections, she was finally able to go on QVC.
- She had 10 minutes to sell 6,000 items.
- She went on with a bare face, Rosacea and all and showed them how the makeup worked.
- The 6,000 items sold.
- She went on to develop a company that sold for 1.2 Billion to L'Oréal—she is now a philanthropist and author.

What she said at the Global Leadership Summit

Rejection is God's protection.

You weren't rejected.

God says I hid your value from that person

[situation, company, whatever]

because they weren't assigned to your destiny.

- So much wisdom there for us.
- We may be rejected by people, situations, organizations, timing, many things God will not allow us to move forward into or give us and yet...
- God can take what seems like a tragic loss at the time and can use it later be used in a great way.
- How did Ezekiel and Daniel respond when taken captives at as young men to a foreign nation?

Instead of WHINING

- They submitted to their situation—we don't ever see them whining.
- Or refusing to do what God asked them to do or complaining. They "quietly waited" as Habakkuk did.
- By their actions they showed they believed in the sovereignty of God, and they lived out this verse:
- ***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. 2:14-1.***
- We might ask, but "Isn't it our right to grumble when we are unfairly treated or tired or grumpy or just feel like it?"
- Nope, "everything" means **everything. Grumbling is NEVER OK if we want to represent our God.**

#2—With hope and trust in God—

They could then WORK

- There is always something to do—something positive, something God-ordained, no matter what is going on, there is always work to be done.
- No matter what the situation, or location, wherever God puts you, His call on your life is never cancelled.

- If you are alive, you have work to do.
- To strengthen you, tell yourself that the God of eternal purposes put you where you are, and as C.S. Lewis reminds us—
- ***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
- So, think of the next world, know your work will never be in vain, and work hard in this one!

Work ethic of

Daniel and his friends

- They became civil servants, ***and they became the best at their jobs.***
- It began early in their captivity when they were first in training, they were offered king's food which was part of their training, but against their Jewish dietary laws.
- How did they respond?
- They didn't act offended or insulted.
- Daniel asked 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.*

The result

- 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 enchanters in his whole kingdom.***
- **Application: their talents were God-given, but they had to apply what they'd been given—and they had to be faithful in it—more about them in a minute, but now to Ezekiel.**

Ezekiel taken to Babylon, but his work was very different

- Daniel was placed at the palace, Ezekiel among the people, and he was of a priestly family when taken to Babylon.
- He had a ***change in location, but not in work, not in calling***, no longer serving comfortably in the Temple in Jerusalem—but he was still called to be a priest, an intermediary between God and man
- ***God decides how our calling will out—He did that for Ezekiel and He does that for us.***
- He was called to special prophetic ministry at 30, when he has an extraordinary vision of the glory of God (some images later), when God said to him,
- Ezekiel 2:3-7 *He said: "Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, . . .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.*
- **Not the most encouraging start and a reminder that "success" is never the measure of our calling—reminder of the story of D.L. Moody.**

#3 As result of no whining and working well at their jobs, each became a WITNESS—

- People came to them.
- If you are faithful—situations will come up—**people will know that you know God.**
- Be open to questions and people asking you about God.
- You don't have to lay out every fact of your faith in one conversation.
- Pray for opportunities, think about possible topics of conversation, invite people to faith-based events.
- Bring friends to Church, Bible study, church social events, Christian movies.
- Let's look at how this worked out in their lives—

First, to Daniel and his friends

- They start out honored—best at their work....but things don't go as well as they might have hoped.
- In Daniel c.2 King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that terrifies him. He calls in his astrologers, to tell him the meaning of it, but he wants to make sure they aren't just making something up, so he tells them they must first tell him the dream itself.
- They protest saying that is impossible and the king orders all of them killed.
- Daniel once again, very politely responds....*Daniel went in to see the king. "Give me a little time," he said, "and I will tell you the dream and what it means."*
- *¹⁷ Then he went home and told Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions. ¹⁸ They asked the God of heaven to show them his mercy by telling them the secret, so they would not die with the others. ¹⁹ And that night in a vision God told Daniel what the king had dreamed.*
- Daniel has the opportunity to tell the king not only the content, but the meaning of his dream of four future kingdoms – in near future history and also culminating with the eternal reign of the coming Messiah—and the same message will be delivered in c.7.....and yes, so much more we could say about it, but we must move on (wasn't a big deal to anyone at that time), life goes on.

#3 Then it's his friends turn to be a Witness

- After praising God for this great revelation, power goes to Nebuchadnezzar's head, and he wants to be worshipped.
- He builds a huge statue and requires ALL to bow down to him or face instant death in the fiery furnace.
- Daniel's friends—they don't bow down, here is what they say:
- *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."***
- **"Even if He does not" that is the statement of faith & trust that ought to be the upspoken attitude of all our prayers.**
- **God may or may not do as we wish and pray, but He is still God and in no one else can we put our hope and trust.**

God did rescue them, but He also did one more extraordinary thing

- They were not alone in the fire.
- He (Nebuchadnezzar) said, **"Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."** Daniel 3:25
- This was what is known as a "theophany."
- A pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity—Jesus. (see lesson on **The Trinity in the Old Testament on Bible805.com**, for more).
- **Remember Jesus promises to be with us ALWAYS—that means in the midst of trials, HE is THERE.**
- Most of the time, He isn't visible to us, but He is always there.

After this Nebuchadnezzar doesn't change much and he has a troubling dream

- As before, Daniel interprets, warns him this time of great personal judgment. God

strikes Nebuchadnezzar down, and he lives like an animal but then he is restored to sanity when he humbled himself before God.

- And then he writes about it—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.*
- **Read the chapter—truly exciting how it went to all the known world at that time, from the most powerful man in the world. Referred to as the “First gospel tract.”**
- **Perhaps the reason for the astounding and short-lived power of Babylon—for this message to be shared.**
- **What an extraordinarily inventive God we serve!**

Daniel continues to be faithful, keeps doing the work he was called to do....

- Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, Belshazzar does not follow him in serving God.
- He holds a drunken party, drinking from the vessels taken from the temple; a hand appears and writes on the wall; he panics.
- Daniel is called in, who interprets the writing—
- **Daniel 5:25-28 “This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin²⁶ “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.”**
- That night Babylon falls and Belshazzar dies—sometimes there is no time to repent.

Now another huge political upheaval

- After the fall of the Babylonia empire and under the next ruler Cyrus, the Jews are allowed to return to the land and 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 [who followed Cyrus] 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.”*
- They come up with a way to trap Daniel, by saying no one could pray to any God other than the king—of course Daniel does.....the result is Daniel in the Lion’s Den.
- **Application challenge: He was an old man then—one would think he’d been through enough—but no retirement, no ceasing of tests for God’s people, no excuses for old age and no cancellation of calling.**

In the Lion’s Den

- *Daniel 6* *At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. ²⁰ When 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?”*
- ²¹ *Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! ²² My 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.”*

- ²³ *The 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 more revelations, but first, let's go back what was happening with Ezekiel.

Ezekiel as a witness

- He was called to be a watchman (this passage is 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. ⁸ When 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 their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood. ⁹ But 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.*
- The job of the watchman incredibly important—then and now—**pray the Christian message is clear and the importance of personal salvation to all.**

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.
- Ezekiel is called to remind them of the sins that brought them where they are (some messages in rather graphic gross details).
- He did this in a variety of ways—he was an extremely creative communicator.
- Many living sermon illustrations: acted out the siege, ate famine food, didn't speak, preached, counseled, answered questions—all calmly and confidently.
- His life was a message also as when his wife died and he was told he could not mourn but must get up and preach as before—illustrating in his life a picture of how the joy of the people, the Temple would be destroyed, and they couldn't do a thing about it.

God used his life to teach His lessons and God continues to do that with others—as the Bible reminds us

- ^{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, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.*
- We've seen how God used Job, Hosea, and others as living illustrations.
- And we are reminded once again that He may use us in similar ways.
- It may not be in the cosmic, or nation-challenging ways of Job and Hosea, but people around you are observing your life.
- Pray you represent your God well.

#4 Finally the Wonder

- Based on their life of faithful witness, both were given glorious visions.
- The visions would not have come if he had not been faithful in not whining, in working, in witnessing, and now they are given glorious visions from God.
- Daniel's have been already been mentioned of the succeeding kingdoms of the earth and the ultimate kingdom of the Messiah.
- Ezekiel—various ones throughout the book.
- In our next lesson we'll talk about interpretation of visions but for now, a little break.....
- The content, meaning of his visions, what they actually looked like have been the theme of art through the ages, here are a few copyright free ones.....

Ezekiel finally sees the vision, the wonder of the renewed, eternal temple, and the water flowing from it

- Are the descriptions of the Temple (or any of the other visions) literal or allegorical?—no definite answer—
- An earthly analogy—no description prepares you for what the Grand Canyon actually looks like until you are THERE.
- I imagine much of heaven and final events on planet earth will be like that—we might think we know, but the reality will be so much more than we can imagine now.
- 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.”***
- **Being with Jesus is the most wonderful thing and that we can know for certain, no interpretation of His promise to be with us always is needed.**
- **And we want to live daily with that coming reality in mind.**

Finally, back to Daniel

- He lived through the entire story of captivity and return.
- Saw all that had been prophesied come true, from deportation to return.
- His prophecies are about the near future of his people are easy to understand, e.g. of Alexander and the 4 generals who will follow him (if you know world history).
- To his future prophecies of the coming of Jesus and then into the far future—not so easy to understand, many interpretations, as we said in the introduction, but getting the timelines and interpretations of them exactly correct is not the primary thing we need to learn.
- ***The overall message is, that God is in control, now and forever.***

A final word to us, our modern message

- ***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*** is the Hebrew word, “sakal” a word comprising those who know God’s Word and live according to it and what makes them wise is that they...
- ***Lead many to righteousness***—not whining, but being a worker and witness wherever you are, seeing and reflecting the wonder of serving God—fulfilling Jesus’ final command in Acts 1:8.
- Be encouraged by His promise to many of you who are wise, as you study His Word and work to live by it, and through your lives and prayers, your witness and work lead many to righteousness, keep in mind, be encouraged and strengthened by the promise—
- ***You will shine like the stars forever and ever!***

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