

# Strangers in the World

## **Daniel and Friends** **Citizens of Two Kingdoms** *Lesson 2*

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### **Introduction**

“Strangers” is a term the Apostle Peter used to describe Christians living in this world. As we grow in our Christian faith this reality becomes more and more evident—“I’m but a stranger here; heaven is my home.” At the same time, God’s will is that we remain in the world until he calls us home. Through this four-week study we will learn from different believers throughout Scripture who have grappled with this reality. We will see how the Lord in his grace sets their hearts and ours on things above and how he equips us to live as strangers in the world.

Today we’ll see how the Lord preserved people like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they lived as strangers in Babylon. Before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians (586 B.C.), the king of Babylon gave orders to the chief of his court officials *“to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego (Daniel 1:3,4,6,7).”*

Centuries later, Peter addressed his first letter to *“God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...”* God’s people were scattered across the Roman Empire. Interestingly, as Peter closes his first letter he says, *“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings.”* It’s likely that Peter is referring to the church in Rome when he says *“She who is in Babylon.”* Believers in Peter’s day were similarly challenged as they lived as citizens in an earthly kingdom, but at the same time they were citizens of an eternal kingdom. Still today believers live as citizens of an earthly nation, and yet we belong to an eternal kingdom.

Who rules over the eternal kingdom?

Who rules over an earthly kingdom?

### **Life in Babylon**

What do you imagine life was like for exiles in Babylon?

**Daniel 1:** <sup>5</sup> *The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service. <sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>18</sup> At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. <sup>20</sup> 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. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.*

What blessings did Daniel and other exiles enjoy as citizens in Babylon? What blessings do you enjoy as citizens of this country?

What dilemma did Daniel face as he entered the king’s service? How did he seek to resolve the dilemma?

Do we face similar dilemmas today in our society?

## ***Earthly Kingdoms Rise and Fall***

**Daniel 2:** [King Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream. Daniel states what the dream was and interprets it].<sup>31</sup> You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.<sup>32</sup> The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze,<sup>33</sup> its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.<sup>34</sup> While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.<sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.<sup>36</sup> “This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.<sup>37</sup> You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;<sup>38</sup> in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.<sup>39</sup> “After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.<sup>40</sup> Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.<sup>41</sup> Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.<sup>42</sup> As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.<sup>43</sup> And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.<sup>44</sup> “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.<sup>45</sup> This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

What truths does Daniel profess concerning earthly kingdoms?

What truths does Daniel profess concerning the eternal Kingdom of God? (See **1 Peter 2:4-12**)

What temptations do you personally experience living as a citizen in an earthly kingdom?

What responsibilities did Daniel and other exiles have as ones living under Babylonian rule?

What responsibilities do you have as citizens of an earthly nation? (Consider **1 Peter 2:13-17**)

How do these truths in Daniel 2 strengthen and equip you to live as strangers in the world?

## ***Standing Firm in the Faith***

**Daniel 3:** [King Nebuchadnezzar set up a statue and issued a decree that when instruments were played, all had to bow down and worship the statue. Some astrologers came forward to denounce the Jews and to point out the three officials in particular who were not obeying the decree] <sup>14</sup>Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Why would people bow down to idols made by human hands?

Describe the type of persecution Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced.

Do you see any parallels between the type of persecution described in this account and the persecution Christians experience today?

Evaluate the response given by these three men.

How does the account of the three men in the fiery furnace strengthen and equip you to live as strangers in this world?

**Daniel 6:** [Daniel is now living and serving under the Medo-Persian Empire. He is one of three officials serving under the king. Other royal officials want Daniel out of the picture. They convince the king to issue a decree that whoever prays to anyone, except to the king, over the next thirty days will be cast into the lions' den]. <sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. <sup>11</sup> Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. <sup>12</sup> So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

<sup>16</sup> So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" <sup>17</sup> A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. <sup>18</sup> Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

<sup>19</sup> At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. <sup>20</sup> 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?" <sup>21</sup> Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! <sup>22</sup> 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, O king." <sup>23</sup> 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.

It was common in ancient times for leaders of nations and empires to be exalted as gods. People don't worship earthly leaders and rulers today... do they? (Consider **Psalms 118:9** and **146:3**)

Compare the type of persecution Daniel faced with the persecution the three men in the fiery furnace faced.

Do you see any parallels between the type of persecution described in this account and the persecution Christians experience today?

What characteristics of God did Daniel profess as he stood firm in his faith?

How does the account of Daniel in the lions' den strengthen and equip you to live as strangers in this world?

**For further study:** Read **Daniel 1-6** for the history of Daniel's life in exile. Read **1 Peter 1-3** in which Peter teaches the truth that we have been called out of the world into the Holy Christian Church and how we live a life that gives testimony of our Christian faith.