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Daniel and God's Mission in Babylon: Lessons for the Modern Church

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ABSTRACT

The study explores Daniel's missiological approach to the Mission of God within the Babylonian culture and its missiological lessons for mission among diverse cultures in the modern church. The paper employed a mix of qualitative and library-based approaches, with the book of Daniel, chapters 1-6, as the central area of focus. This approach analysed primary and secondary data from scholarly and religious texts, which were selected based on relevance, with validity ensured through cross-referencing of the data. Data were coded to identify central themes and refined through an iterative analysis process. The study found that in mission, a balance between presence and proclamation is crucial, and missionaries should consider every place as an opportunity for mission. Overall, the study asserts that following the example of Daniel, missionaries should remain faithful, be courageous, and active in their mission in diverse contexts. They should uphold cultural adaptability, spiritual integrity, and strategic engagement as methods that can be employed for mission in the contemporary church. Missionaries should embrace humility, cultural awareness, and strategic planning to understand cultural contexts while staying true to biblical truths as Daniel did. The study recommends training church leaders and members in cultural adaptability, context-aware communication, respectful cross-cultural engagement, and prayer as missiological approaches for missions in diverse cultural environments.

Keywords: Babylonian culture, cultural adaptability, cross-cultural engagement, mission in Babylon, mission of God.



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INTRODUCTION

The paper explores Daniel's Mission approach in Babylon, a foreign culture, and the lessons it holds for modern church missions in diverse cultural contexts. In Genesis 12:1-2, God promises Abraham that He will bless him and his descendants so that they, in turn, may bless other nations. This means that they would bless other nations by introducing them to the God of Israel (Barnes, n.d., Genesis 12:1-2)

Genesis 12:1-2. Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing (ESV).

According to Wilson (2021), this mandate in Genesis 12:1-2 sets the foundation for the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 by establishing the lineage and promise, while Mathew provides the ongoing mission to fulfil that promise. Based on these mandates, the church today continues to share the Gospel message to all people, and in the effort of fulfilling this mandate, the church and missionaries are exposed to diverse cultural contexts that require multicultural approaches.

According to Abasciano (2021a), the Book of Daniel offers a profound narrative that explores God's mission within the context of a foreign and hostile culture. This paper examines how Daniel, a faithful servant of God, maintained his allegiance to Yahweh while living in exile under Babylonian rule, which made him emerge as a successful missionary. Understanding the historical and cultural background of the Babylonian captivity is crucial to fully understand the importance of Daniel's actions and God's mission in that context.

According to Chisholm (2018), in 605 B.C., Babylon, ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar, besieged Jerusalem and deported many of its citizens, including young leaders like Daniel. This forced assimilation into a dominant pagan culture created significant challenges for Jewish identity, worship, and values. Smith (2020) asserts that the Book of Daniel is a vital resource for understanding how God works through His people in non-religious settings.

Exploration of how Daniel interacted with the Babylonian kings, their culture, and their pattern of worship, and how he managed to make his God (*Yahweh*) popular in Babylon is important. It can help modern church missionaries, and indeed all believers, understand how to conduct God's mission in diverse cultural contexts effectively.

Mission of God (*Missio Dei*).

God's sending. According to Flett (2024), this concept presents God as a missional God who goes out first on a mission, then sends His people, or the church, as His missional agents. This action of God as a missionary is evident in Genesis 3:8, where He went to look for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned by eating the forbidden fruit and hid themselves from God.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Babylonian Exile

According to Abasciano (2021a), the story in the Book of Daniel occurred during the Babylonian exile, a pivotal period in Israel's history that significantly influenced Jewish identity and religion. Brandon (2024) states that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem's temple in 586 B.C., and exile was not only a political and military disaster for the Israelites, but it also generated fundamental theological concerns about God's promises and the importance of temple worship. It was a real surprise to the Israelites. They did not expect the captivity based on God's promise in 2 Samuel 7:16.

As recorded in Daniel 1:3-5, the Babylonians sought to destroy Judah's social and political structures while also bringing potential individuals into the Babylonian system. They pursued the educated, competent, and aristocratic elites, including Daniel. During their exile, Daniel and his companions were sent to the Babylonian royal court to learn new things. According to Chisholm (2018), this was a way of modifying the identity of the Hebrews to conform to Babylonian norms. This effort was not only intellectual but also cultural and religious.

Babylonian Society

According to Abasciano (2021a), the Hebrew boys in the Book of Daniel were compelled to worship the golden image. This demonstrates how the state supported idol worship, something that was not accepted in the covenant stipulations between God and the Israelites. In the Ten Commandments, God instructs His people not to

worship or bow to any other god in any form, including images. This decree, therefore, made the religious environment hostile to the Israelites' monotheistic and covenantal beliefs; Jewish refugees felt compelled to fit in or remain faithful to their God and face persecution.

In the present church, members sometimes find themselves in similar scenarios at the workplace, in schools, among other cultures, in interfaith marriages, or in communities with unique cultures from their original culture. Missionaries also find it very challenging when faced with a new culture where they have to learn a new language, new food, new association, new pattern of behaviour, and all that the new culture demands, and at the same time remain faithful to the Bible.

According to Smith (2020), another significant aspect of Babylonian society was the imperial authority. The king was considered a representative of the God of Babylon. He required complete loyalty to the empire's dictatorial and hierarchical authority. This was evident in Nebuchadnezzar's reign, where he required blind obedience and relied on intimidation and theatrics to display his strength. The loyalty tests that Daniel and his friends went through, including refusing to eat unclean food (Daniel 1), interpreting the king's visions (Daniel 2, 4), or choosing faith over forced worship (Daniel 3, 6), show how imperial authority and divine obedience are at odds with one another.

In this terrible place, where a pagan authority ruled, Daniel's unwavering faith in God provided a brilliant example of spiritual strength and purpose. Because of this, Babylon's cultural and historical setting was one of imperial domination, forced religion, and movement. However, God's work continued nonetheless.

Daniel's Position

According to Smith (2023), Daniel was among a group of young aristocrats of royal origin selected to study the language, literature, and customs of the Chaldeans (Daniel 1:3-6). Babylon had been intending this appointment. The goal was to harness the leadership and intelligence of conquered peoples to aid Babylon in achieving its objectives. Nguyen asserts that Daniel was at the core of the empire's power once he became the king's servant. This put him in considerable moral and spiritual turmoil. He refused the king's food and wine, which may have been linked to idol worship or seen as

unclean by Jewish law (Daniel 1:8). Wright (2018) makes it clear that Daniel's decision was motivated by his faith rather than the desire to rebel against another culture, suggesting that being faithful to God is more important than pursuing personal gain or seeking acceptance from others.

According to Kgatle (2022), Daniel had to choose between following God's orders and giving in to imperial authority numerous times throughout the account. For instance, when Daniel was asked to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2), he prayed to God instead of adopting Babylonian methods. Cho (2023) said that Daniel made prayer his lifestyle. He disregarded the law and continued to pray to God, even though Darius had made it illegal for anyone, except the king, to pray (Daniel 6:10). In both instances, Daniel demonstrated that he had a deep faith despite the cultural and political pressures he faced. His actions illustrate that devotion to God knows no social or regional bounds.

Smith (2020) continues to argue that these events in the book of Daniel demonstrate how God can use obedient individuals to carry out His plans, even in a kingdom that does not believe in Him. Daniel was not in court only to preserve his life; he was there to testify on behalf of God in a culture that was consumed by its influences. His life is a remarkable example of how Christians can make a positive impact in the world while remaining true to their faith.

Personal Integrity and Faithfulness (Daniel 1)

According to Longman (2020), Daniel's commitment to purity and adherence to the laws of God, even when Babylonian leaders were pressuring him to do otherwise, made him stand out as an exceptional missionary. As detailed in Daniel 1, he demonstrated that he was a man of unquestionable integrity when he refused to eat and drink the royal food and wine while at the Babylonian court. This statement is supported by Walton and Keener (2019), who point out that Daniel's polite and thoughtful request for a different diet proved that he was following God's rules and that he was smart enough to deal with Babylonian authorities without openly disobeying them.

Longman III (2019b) elucidates on this point by further stating that Daniel focused on his holiness in the privacy of his own life, which became the foundation of his

public witness. This indicates that God's work typically begins with His people choosing to follow His laws, even when other things attempt to draw them away from Him.

Wisdom and Witness (Daniel 2, 4, 5)

According to Longman (2019c), Daniel's role in God's mission was based on his ability to interpret dreams and his God-given insight. Daniel prayed and asked God to reveal the significance and substance of King Nebuchadnezzar's incredible dream in Daniel 2. In response, God revealed to Daniel a vision that unravelled the secret. This saved not only his own life but also the lives of the other wise men in Babylon (Daniel 2:19-23).

Daniel seized this opportunity to demonstrate that Yahweh is superior to the Babylonian gods and human wisdom by stating that the "God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (Daniel 2:28) provided him with his insight. Daniel's witness brought the truth about God's power to the core of a pagan country. The king called Daniel's God a God of gods and a Lord of lords, as is recorded in Daniel 2:47.

In Daniel 4, Daniel once again interpreted a dream to Nebuchadnezzar. This time, he warned the king that he would be judged because he was too proud and would not embrace God. Even though it was hard for him, Daniel bravely and kindly told the king to stop sinning and start doing good (Daniel 4:27). This statement required wisdom to speak it since it was not a simple statement to be spoken to a king. This kind of wisdom is crucial for effective communication with people across statuses and ranks when correcting errors and communicating the Word of God.

When the prophecy came true and Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, he publicly praised the Most High God and acknowledged that Yahweh was the greatest and would rule forever (Daniel 4:34-37). Daniel's faithful witness made it possible for one of the most obvious examples of a Gentile ruler recognising God's might. Similarly, in Daniel, the king Belshazzar was informed by Daniel about the meaning of a strange writing on the wall (Daniel 5). He explained that God's anger caused the king's pride and blasphemy.

Courage and Conviction (Daniel 3, 6)

According to Adeyemi (2021), Daniel's role in God's plan is clearer in two of the most renowned stories in the Old Testament: The Lion's Den (Daniel 6) and the Burning Furnace (Daniel 3). These accounts demonstrate how God's word is spread by those who are willing to die for it and remain unshakably faithful even in the most challenging situations.

Longman (2019c), Smith (2022), and Kim (2023) state that in all the stories, Daniel or his friends are the protagonists. They choose to be loyal to God above the empire, and their actions demonstrate how firm and unchanging God is. In Daniel 3, King Nebuchadnezzar tells Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to kneel before a big gold statue, a command that was not only a political act; it was a blatant invitation to idolatry, which went against the basic ideas of Jewish monotheism (Exodus 20:3-5).

The three missionaries bravely refused the king's order. They are famous for stating, "The God we serve can save us, but even if He doesn't, we want you to know that we will not serve your gods" (Daniel 3:17-18, NIV). Their words clearly show that they decisively believe that faith in God is built on trust and obedience, rather than outcomes. When a fourth person appeared with them, "like a son of the gods," it showed that God was with them and powerful even when they were being persecuted. After realising the greatness of the Hebrew God through the miracle, Nebuchadnezzar promoted the three people in his government (Daniel 3:28-30). Daniel 6 reveals that Daniel was as courageous and dedicated as Darius the Mede.

Daniel maintained his strict habit of praying out loud to God three times a day, even though he knew that doing so would likely result in his being thrown into a den of lions (Daniel 6:10). The reason was that the king had issued an injunction prohibiting anyone from praying within thirty days. He did this intentionally, not out of caprice. He proclaimed that no earthly power could alter his covenantal adherence to God. According to Gentry and Wellum (2015), Daniel was fearless because he trusted that God was all-powerful and never changed. Gentry and Wellum (2015) further assert that Daniel and his comrades' refusal to give up, even when they were on the verge of death, demonstrated to the pagan kings and surrounding nations God's might and nature. Because of

what they did, people openly recognised God's authority, which helped Him achieve His goals in a culture that had not sought or revered Him.

Godly Rule of Nations

According to Longman (2019c), Collins (2021), and Gentry (2020), in Daniel 7 and 8, monarchs are depicted as transient players under God's ultimate authority, and empires are represented as animals. This idea is carried over to these visions. These visions suggest that even the most powerful civilisations are fleeting and may be subject to God's will. God's power not only affects Israel, but it also affects the entire globe. He chooses when nations rise and fall to fulfil His salvation purposes. The exiled people were more content, as they knew that their God was still in control, despite Babylon and other pagan nations appearing to be in control.

The Global Mission of God

The exile is a key part of God's plan for the entire world, even if it was initially perceived as a national tragedy and a form of divine punishment. The exile does not weaken Israel; instead, it promotes God's message beyond the borders of Judah. Daniel and his friends demonstrate to the mightiest kings on earth who God is.

Nebuchadnezzar sees God's might at work through Daniel and his friends and then publicly declares, "His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:3). After Daniel's miraculous escape from the lions' den, King Darius, in like manner as Nebuchadnezzar, praises the living God (Daniel 6:26–27).

Kim (2022) and Adeyemi (2023) state that it is peculiar that Gentile kings, rather than Israelite prophets or priests, give these statements. God demonstrates that His goal is not limited to a single nation when He moves the scene of His revelation first out of the Jerusalem temple and then out of the courts of heathen monarchs into exile. The Book of Daniel foreshadows the broader biblical concept of God's love for all people, which is fully realised in the New Testament through the Gospel's universal message. Because of the exile, God's greatness is evident to all the nations. This is what He promised Abraham: that all the nations would be blessed through his offspring (Genesis 12:3).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, theological literary methodology, focusing on a detailed examination of chapters 1-6 of the Book of Daniel. These passages detail Daniel's experiences and his interactions with the Babylonian authorities. Sources such as scholarly commentaries, religious writings, and other materials were utilised to provide context and interpretive depth. Ethical considerations were prioritised to ensure respectful treatment of sacred texts and cultural sensitivities. The selection of passages was based on their relevance to the research objectives.

To improve validity, data triangulation was performed by comparing biblical texts with scholarly interpretations and historical information. The coding process involved systematically organising textual data to identify key themes, which were then refined through multiple review cycles. Theme development followed a structured approach: initial coding, grouping related codes into broader themes, and finalising themes by identifying patterns across the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gentry and Wellum (2015) assert that the Book of Daniel provides readers from both the past and the present with important theological and missional insights, particularly when considering God's mission in the Babylonian society. Its narrative gives us more than just historical support; it also provides a way to understand how God's people can connect honestly with civilisations that are foreign, non-religious, or even hostile to their faith.

Daniel's life and how God's work is demonstrated through him and his friends have a profound impact on how Christians are expected to live, witness, and participate in God's purpose to save people in all nations and situations.

Cultural Faithfulness

Daniel's experience has profound theological consequences, one of which is that you do not have to give up your faith to be involved in culture. Daniel and his colleagues maintained their morals and beliefs, even though they held the highest positions in a pagan government. Smith (2022) and Kim (2023) state that they learned about Babylonian language, literature, and

customs (Daniel 1:4), yet they never broke their promise to Yahweh.

This balance suggests that Christians should engage with other cultures while remaining faithful to God and the biblical truth. In mission, this implies that social marginalisation is not a prerequisite for fidelity. Instead, it invites individuals to reflect and engage with cultural structures consciously.

Mission as Presence and Proclamation

Daniel's testimony is an example of both statement and presence. He demonstrated the extent of his love for God through his life by being honest, praying, and remaining faithful to his convictions. He was also daring enough to proclaim that God was almighty, challenge kings, and interpret dreams to propagate the truth. This two-step strategy of telling the truth and displaying faith provides an entire testimony.

It emphasises the connection between love and truth, as well as between faith and deeds. An effective mission involves preaching and practising the Gospel. You cannot simply remain quiet when it comes to God's truth; you must be both engaged and devout at the same time. Gentry and Wellum (2015) argue that believers are called to be faithful in private and brave in public, demonstrating the Gospel every day and seizing opportunities to proclaim God's justice and redemptive purpose even in unlikely situations.

Boldness to Defend the Truth

Daniel and his friends were always fearless when it came to doing the right thing, whether it was refusing to bow to idols (Daniel 3) or praying against an oppressive law (Daniel 6). Their example reminds us to adhere to our biblical principles, even when they are complex or costly, in a world where moral compromise is frequent and truth is often arbitrary. Ngewa (2020) asserts that modern Christians do not have to deal with lions or furnaces. However, they do face discrimination, social pressure, derision, and job consequences for sticking to their Christian beliefs. Daniel's story encourages Christians to trust in God's might and choose loyalty over fear, even when following God's orders means putting themselves in danger. His life is a reminder that God rewards those who honour Him (1 Samuel 2:30) and that meeting God frequently means making enormous sacrifices for yourself.

Being Involved in the Mission of God Beyond Church Walls

According to Burge et al. (2016), the most common usage of the word "exile" is probably to regard it as an opportunity for mission instead of a punishment. Instead of waiting to be sent back to Jerusalem to serve God, Daniel perceived his unusual location as an opportunity to serve as a witness to God. Christians should also be missional, regardless of their location. Mission should take place where God's people are found, and missionaries or church members should move out to various mission contexts and share the Word of God beyond the confines of their churches.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study explores Daniel's mission strategy in Babylon, highlighting how he navigated a vastly different culture from that of the Hebrews and what modern churches can learn from his approach in diverse cultural settings. The primary focus is on how Daniel managed to remain faithful to the Hebrew God and His teachings while interacting with a foreign culture. His story exemplifies key principles, including cultural adaptability, steadfast spiritual integrity, and strategic interaction with the host culture—principles that align with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, where Jesus instructs His followers to spread the Gospel globally.

Drawing inspiration from Daniel, contemporary missionaries are encouraged to adopt humility, cultural awareness, and strategic planning. Emphasising the importance of understanding cultural differences and forming genuine relationships, the research highlights that successful mission work involves striking a balance between local cultural engagement and faithfulness to biblical truths. Ultimately, Daniel's example offers valuable lessons for today's church, emphasising the importance of cultural sensitivity, strategic thinking, and faithfulness in reaching diverse people.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the study recommends the following practical interventions to churches following Daniel's example:

1. Churches should train leaders on cultural adaptability when engaging in cross-cultural mission. Churches should train members to see every environment as a mission platform.

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| 2. Churches should train missionaries and members in contextualised communication skills for sharing the Gospel in diverse cultural contexts, as exemplified by Daniel. | 3. Churches should train members to handle other cultures with respect. |
| | 4. Church members and missionaries should cultivate a culture of prayer when engaging in mission work. |

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