What do you associate with the words “home” and “exile”?

With “home”, I associate warm food, a comfortable bed, family, and pajama pants. Home is a happy word.

With “exile”, I associate chains, deserted islands, slavery, abduction, loneliness, and pain. Exile is a harsh word.

The human experience is more “exile” than “home”. Hebrews 11:13 identifies a common characteristic of people who lived by faith. They all “acknowledge that they were strangers and exiles on earth.” Sin exiled humanity from their original home. People who live by faith recognize that this world is not home and they live for their true home.

The book of Daniel tells a story of exile that serves as an insightful mini-narrative of the general human condition of exile. The problems and prayers from Babylon give insight into our exile experience.

In the story of Daniel, home was in Jerusalem and exile was in Babylon. These two cities have a high level of contrast to each other and a deep level of significance to our exile.

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| **Babylon** | **Jerusalem** |
| First mentioned as “Babel”, the kingdom of Nimrod whose name means “let us rebel” (Genesis 10:8-10) | First mention as “selem”, the home of Melchizedek whose name means “king of righteousness” (Genesis 14:18-20) |
| Built in the place there the Tower of Babel was constructed (Genesis 11) | Built around Mount Zion  |
| Means “confusion” | Means “City of Peace” |
| Home of 955 temple to false gods and the central place for pagan worship | The location of the temple of God and the central place for worshipping God  |
| Babylon is the fallen false religious system that seeks the worship of the whole world (Revelation 13 and 14) | The New Jerusalem is the eternal, perfect home for God’s people (Revelation 21) |

**Exile Insights from Chapter 2**

The first prayer is mentioned in Daniel 2:17-18.

*Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,**and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

Have you ever been the one to share really bad news? The matter that Daniel made known to his friends was bad.

The King had a dream and demanded that the wise men tell him the dream and the interpretations. That is a lot of pressure. They were demanded by the king to do something impossible. They pressure increased when the king added that if they did to do it he would have them torn limb from limb and have their houses ruined (v5). The wisemen respond with the obvious truth, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult.” (v10-11)

When Daniel was brought into the situation it was not to interpret the dream but to be taken for execution. That is the matter that he told his friends about.

**Problem Insight #1- Our exile makes impossible demands.**

We know what it feels like. What is expected of us is more than can be done. Our responsibilities pull us in too many directions. We are faced with moral impossibilities, things we technically could do, but not without violating our moral convictions. There are problems we can’t solve. We simply don’t have the skill, wisdom, energy resources or information. Remember, Babylon means confusion. Our exile makes impossible demands.

*What is the danger?*

The impossible demand can drive us to bad places. We try to cope, resist, or escape in destructive ways. We get overwhelmed. We give up. We live defeated. We don’t solve the problem.

*What should we do?*

Daniel admitted the impossibility. He knew he could not meet the demand. When something is impossible it is liberating to admit it. Stop trying to do what is simply impossible.

Daniel prayed to a God that he knew was able (v27). He gathered his friend to pray with him. Their impossible demand was to produce knowledge that was out of their reach. In this first prayer, we don’t have the words of the prayer recorded but we know that they gathered to seek the mercy of God (v18) and we know that they asked God to reveal the wisdom they lacked (v23).

God did it (v19). Daniel prayed another prayer, this one of praise.

***Verse 20-23*** *Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.**He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;**he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.**To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.”*

The prayer affirmed that God has wisdom (v20) and that he shares that wisdom when we need it (v23).

**Prayer Insight #1- God is able and he gives us the ability we need.**

The wisemen believed that their god’s were able. They said, “The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the *king except the gods”*(v11). They didn’t believe that their gods would share that wisdom. They didn’t believe that their gods interacted with humans in that cooperative way. Their knowledge, power and ability was inaccessible. The rest of verse 11 describes those God’s as those “whose dwelling is not with flesh.” Praise God, he was willing to dwell with flesh. He is a God who interacts with his people. In you current impossibility, affirm God’s ability and depend on him to give what you need to confront the impossibility.

**Exile Insights from Chapter 4**

Nebuchadnezzar had another dream. This time, he remembered it and told it to Daniel. He chose Daniel because he said, “spirit of the holy gods is in you” (v18). Again, God revealed the interpretation to Daniel and Daniel shared the interpretation with the king. In the previous interpretation Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. In this interpretation Nebuchadnezzar was turned into a wild animal for 7 years to learn that God is the supreme ruler and not him. He continued in pride and lost his kingdom.

***Verses 29-33*** *At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,****30****and the king answered and said, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”****31****While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,****32****and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.”*

**Problem Insight #2 - Our exile is infected with a love of the glory of the world.**

*What is the danger?*

Pride and materialism are a constant threat to our wellbeing. Babylon relentlessly promotes it’s glory to gain our worship (Revelation 13). Our exile can hijack our affections. The pitfalls are the love of the world and the pride of live (1 John 2:15). Nebuchadnezzar was at home in Babylon but his pride exiled him from his kingdom. Pride has power to take captives.

*What should we do?*

Nebuchadnezzar prayed like an animal. Listen to his prayer. This prayer does not come from Daniel but from Nebuchadnezzar.

***Verses 34-35***At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; **35**all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

There are three important steps in verse 34, 1. He lifted up his eye to heaven, 2. His reason returned, and 3. He blessed the most high.

He didn’t start by praising God’s glory, only by looking at it. Looking at it brought back reason and then he praised it.

**Prayer Insight #2- Focusing of God’s Glory puts everything else into its proper place.**

We fight against the attack of earthly glory by focusing on a greater glory. We attack pride through the worship of God.

Noticed what happened once Nebuchadnezzar gave God glory and how he summarized the whole thing.

***Verses 36-37*** *At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.****37****Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

**Exile Insights from Chapter 6**

When the Persian rulers took over Babylon. Daniel was promoted. Others in the government looked for fault in Daniel but could only find an “excellent Spirit” and “faithfulness (v3,4). The only way they could get Daniel to do something wrong was to legally force him against the law of God.

Babylon didn’t care if Daniel worshiped God. Their religion synchronized the various religions in their culture. But they were obsessed with power. So the schemers proposed a loyalty test. Nobody could make petition to any other God but the king for 30 days. For Daniel this was a loyalty test to God.

**Problem Insight #3- Our Exile uses religious persecution to take down the faithful.**

They didn’t mind if people worshipped their God they just didn’t wanted to establish supremacy over him. You can be loyal as long as your are more loyal to the world. This world is not above messing intentionally with your religious convictions. Religious persecution is a tried and true strategy of Satan.

*What is the danger?*

We could give in. We could hide. We stress. We petition. We protest. We get really possessive about our rights. And we let it all distract us from remaining faithful.

*What should we do?*

Verse 10 is loaded with insight.

*When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.*

Daniel opened his window toward Jerusalem. That was home. Incorporate tangible practices to orient yourself toward your true homeland. Face heaven. Open your window toward the promise land.

Daniel was not ignorant of the decree but “when Daniel knew” his first response was to pray. The mandates made the prayer more necessary.

This was a practice “he had done previously”. Daniel had made faithfulness to God part of his life. Don’t wait for the government to tell you can’t worship to start worshipping. Now is the time to build your life around spiritual practices that will keep you grounded in persecution.

Daniel “gave thanks”. We don’t know the full content of his prayer. The decree was against making petition to any other God. We don’t know that Daniel did that. But he did thank God. Praise God in the worst of situations. He is still good. If everything else fail and your life is threatened one thing is still true, God is worthy of worship. And expressing that thanks takes our minds to the best place possible.

**Prayer Insight #3 - Staying faithful is more important that staying alive.**

The enemy can’t change God’s love for us, but he can attack our love for God. When we stay faithful, we keep intact the love relationship that matters for eternity. There are much worse things than dying, losing all we have, or being thrown into lions’ dens. The important part is not that deliverance from the lions den but the willingness to go into it. God can save, but ever if he doesn’t we will be faithful (Chapter 3).

**Exile Insights from Chapter 9**

In chapter 9 we have a shorter story and a longer prayer. The story is summarized in verse 2.

*In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.*

**Problem Insight #4- The Exile is Long**

*What is the danger?*

When things get long, we get sleepy. When you are on a long road trip you need to make sure you can keep your eyes open. When the sermon gets to long I know what starts to happen. Some exiles had forgotten about returning to Jerusalem. Some forgot about the prophecy of deliverance. Babylon was becoming home. We have a promise of a second coming. The length of the exile can cause us to become content here. We risk settling into a lukewarm spirituality. We risk letting the oil run out of the lamps while the bridegroom tarries. We risk settling into Babylon as our home.

*What should we do?*

The prayer in Daniel 9 is a powerful response to the length of the exile. I’ll summarize it.

**Desperation**- There was a desperation both in the content and in the posture of this prayer.

***Verse 3*** Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

**Confession**- Daniel made confession (v4) and he got specific. He confessed that they had sinned by not listening to God, rebelling against him, not obeying him, and that to them belonged open shame.

**Clinging to God’s goodness**- The prayer addresses God as the one who keeps covenant, to him belongs righteousness, mercy and forgiveness.

**Seeking grace based on God’s goodness-** Daniel makes his requestion “according to all your [God’s] righteous acts” (v16) and “because of your [God’s] great mercy” (v18).

**Prayer Insight #4 - Combat spiritual sleepiness with urgent prayer for spiritual awakening!**

What do you associate with the words “home” and “exile”? Exile reminds us that there are some large problems. Home reminds us that the God we pray to will bring us through them all.