

“Here is an ideal combination: Alistair Begg, one of today’s stand-out gospel communicators, reflecting on the life, wisdom, and sheer guts of Daniel, one of yesterday’s outstanding heroes of the faith. Courage is a common thread that runs through the lives of such men and women. With clarity and grace, it is laid bare before us in these pages as one of our great needs today. *Brave by Faith* is certain to challenge and encourage Christians of every age and at every stage in life. A book for our times!”

**SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON, Professor of Systematic Theology, RTS;
Author, *To Seek and to Save and Devoted to God***

“Alistair Begg engagingly opens up Daniel 1 – 7 to encourage believers to live an excellent Christian life in the midst of the fiery furnace of national iniquity and injustice. The secret? Trusting and obeying the sovereign God. For, though the world would send God’s children to the lions’ den, ‘the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits’ (Daniel 11 v 32). A timely book that is needed today and that can also help us prepare for tomorrow.”

**JOEL R. BEEKE, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,
Grand Rapids, Michigan**

“*Brave by Faith* could not be more timely. Alistair Begg beautifully paints the ancient biblical story of Daniel, equipping modern readers with enduring truth and courage to live well in grim times. And he gives us a winsome reminder of how our story will actually end.”

**ELLEN VAUGHN, New York Times bestselling author;
Author, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot***

“With characteristic clarity and warmth, Alistair shows God's people how to make brave choices as a misunderstood minority in challenging times. Like Daniel and his friends, we need a clear understanding that our unchanging, powerful, sovereign God is on the throne and that both the present and the future are in his hands. This book shows how humble, prayerful, calm, obedient trust in our sovereign Lord will shape our choices and our responses as we live in this world as citizens of the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus. We can take heart and live bravely because our risen Lord has overcome the world.”

**JONATHAN PRIME, Associate National Director (Pastoral Ministries) of
the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), UK**

“Alistair Begg’s may be the most recognizable Christian voice on air in America today. In this book, he takes us to the book of Daniel to jolt American and Western Christians awake to the reality of ‘exile’ in our own land and show how we ought to act in that context. This book is indeed a shock, but though it is blunt, it is also full of hope. Pastor Begg has delivered an elixir: truth and confidence in God. Now is the time for serious people with serious worries to turn to trusted voices that speak bluntly to these times, and that is what Alistair Begg does.”

HUGH HEWITT, Radio Talk Show Host; Author; Columnist

“If anything seems to be missing or elusive in the lives of Christians today, it is the presence of courage. One of the virtues of courage is that it holds on to hope. Alistair Begg helps us all by taking us back to the notable Old Testament model for both hope and courage—the prophet Daniel. You will be refreshed and strengthened by a fresh look at the young prophet and his friends as they face life-threatening hostility in a pagan world.”

JOHN MACARTHUR, Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California; Chancellor Emeritus, The Master’s Seminary

“I have always admired Alistair’s God-given courage and conviction in speaking and writing about biblical truth which everyone needs to hear but far too many are afraid to say. In that same spirit, *Brave by Faith* is a phenomenal book with a timely message.”

DAVID NASSER, Senior Vice President, Liberty University

“This is a brilliant book. Alistair Begg handles the text beautifully and applies it incisively to the specific challenges we face at this cultural moment. Best of all, reading through Daniel 1 – 7 along with this book refreshed and strengthened my confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. I can’t recommend it highly enough.”

**GARY MILLAR, Principal, Queensland Theological College, Australia;
Author, *Need to Know***

ALISTAIR BEGG

BRAVE

BY FAITH

GOD-SIZED CONFIDENCE IN A
POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

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*To Jeff Mills,
a brave and faithful
partner in the gospel*

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INTRODUCTION: THE WIND HAS CHANGED

*“These all died in faith ... having acknowledged
that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”
(Hebrews 11 v 13)*

*“I urge you, as sojourners and exiles...”
(1 Peter 2 v 11)*

For many years, I think we’ve read those verses and thought, “I wonder what it’s like to be a stranger, a sojourner, and an exile in this world.”

Now we know.

I lived the first 31 years of my life in Scotland. For the last 38, I’ve lived in the US. And for the first time since I’ve lived here, I sense a significant shift in the mentality of the people of God. By that I don’t mean a change in how people of vague religious spiritual interest are feeling, or even in how church attenders are feeling, but in how

those who are committed to serving their Savior Jesus and to obeying his word in the Bible are feeling.

Many of us appear to be completely overwhelmed by the reality that we are no longer a majority and our views are no longer considered acceptable or even expressible.

That's because the wind has changed. If you are reading this in the UK or Australia, you'll know it changed earlier: perhaps a decade or so ago. In the US, it's changed in the past five years. The prevailing wind is no longer at the back of the sails of professing Bible-believing Christians. Indeed, the wind appears to be blowing hard behind the forces of secularism. I'm not an analyst of culture, and I don't want to overstate this; but I don't want to understate it, either. I travel a fair bit around the US, and regularly back to the UK too. And I've seen that the old days of the "Moral Majority" in the US and bravado over all that would be achieved by those endeavors, and the idea of either the UK or the US being a "Christian country," have gone. As Tim Keller describes it:

"We are entering a new era in which there is not only no social benefit to being Christian, but an actual social cost. In many places, culture is becoming increasingly hostile toward faith, and beliefs in God, truth, sin, and the afterlife are disappearing in more and more people. Now, culture is producing people for whom Christianity is not only offensive, but incomprehensible."

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-to-reach-the-west-again/>)

The people of God are now living with the awareness that we are being pushed hard, in the words of the psalmist, and many of us feel we are about to fall (Psalm 118 v 13-14). Secularism and the modern paganism that goes with it are taking their toll.

So I find that American Christians are now looking over the Atlantic Ocean in a way that they hadn't done previously. When Americans I knew used to visit Britain, they would say to me on their return what a wonderful, beautiful, history-soaked place it was to visit; and they would ask me why so many of the churches were so empty. But what is happening now is that American Christians are beginning to realize that our nation is starting to look a lot like Europe. We are starting to feel that the notion of a persecuted church—which we've understood theoretically and who we've prayed for from a distance—is coming ever closer. It's beginning to dawn on us in the West that the things we've sung about may actually be true. Honestly, I had little idea what I was saying when I sang as a child:

*This world is not my home,
I'm just a-passing through.
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue.*

In reality, for us in the English-speaking West this world has tended to feel very much like home, and our treasures have been right before our eyes. But now we are finally facing the fact that this broken, sinful world in which we live is not actually our home—that what

the Bible says concerning believers in this world is really true: that we really are aliens and that we really are strangers. The fact of the matter is that it has always been true that we are strangers in and to this world. It has just been clouded, obscured by the size and influence and legal protection of the church in most of the Western world. But this world is not actually our home. We're not supposed to be settling down here forever. We're not supposed to be treating this life the way other people treat it, as if this is the be-all and end-all of everything, or as if as Christians we can have a comfortable, respectable, prosperous life here and look forward to even more of those things in eternity.

Secularism pushes back again and again against what the Bible says about sexual ethics, about salvation, about education, about the role and reach of the state, or about matters of public welfare. Public opinion has turned against Christians. As the British columnist and social commentator Melanie Phillips puts it, we live in a culture...

"... which will have no truck with claims such as religious miracles or the existence of God. These are dismissed as the superstitious beliefs of a bygone primitive age of myth and bigotry."

(The World Turned Upside Down, page 2)

Superstitious bigotry. Suddenly, as a minority group within an increasingly secularized nation, we are finding out how it feels to be outsiders. And we don't like it. We're not used to it. And it's easy to become bewildered, angry, defensive, or defeated.

So the question is, what does it look like to live as a Christian in a society that does not like what Christians believe, what we say, and how we live? How are you going to live in this new normal?

Enter the book of Daniel.

MORE ABOUT BELIEVING THAN BEING

Daniel and his friends had grown up in the promised land, in Judah. As young men, they found themselves being dragged into exile, far away from the society they had known, into a city that neither knew of nor cared about nor was impressed by their faith or their lives. Daniel would live in Babylon from his late teens or early twenties until he was in his eighties or nineties. Most likely he died there. These exiles were understandably fearful of the power that held them in its grip, and were wondering what God was doing and whether they could (or should) keep obeying him in such circumstances.

And so the message of Daniel is incredibly relevant for us in our generation. Not because it maps out a strategy for how to deal with our new lack of status—or to reverse it. Not because Daniel was a great man and we need to follow his example, buck up, and be more like him. Yes, it's a good idea to seek to emulate the men and women of faith we find in the pages of the Bible. But no, this book will not tell you to be like Daniel. Instead, it will call you to believe in Daniel's God. We will be able to navigate our present moment to the extent that we realize that the God of the exiles in the sixth century BC has not changed in the intervening two and a half millennia. As we walk through the twists and turns of the first

seven chapters of the book of Daniel, we will see some heroes and some anti-heroes: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and the kings Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius (and, of course, some lions). But these are not really the heroes of Daniel 1 – 7. Neither are you or I (we weren't even there). God is always the hero of the story. And that is why we need to discover the message of the book of Daniel: to rediscover our confidence in the God who reveals himself there.

This book is therefore going to give you at least six parts God for every one part Daniel or anyone else. For the overarching message is simply this: God is powerful, and God is sovereign, and even in the face of circumstances that appear to be prevailing against his people, we may trust him entirely. The battle may seem to be tilting against the church, but still God reigns supreme. I make no apology for the fact that each chapter's theme is a variation of this message. If the exiles needed a whole book to remind them of and steady them in this great truth, then so do we today.

So how can we, as Christians, keep our courage and hope, in this culture? Is it even worth continuing to live as a Christian? Look to the God whom Daniel knew and we will find out why, and how, to live as his people. We'll see that there is a better way than growing angry, or keeping our heads down, or retreating, or giving up altogether.

Here is how you stand firm and live bravely when the wind is blowing hard against you.

1

KNOW YOUR LINES

Much is revealed about us in times of crisis.

And the book of Daniel opens with a national and personal crisis. We are in “the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah” (Daniel 1 v 1). The people of God—the Jews—are living in the land promised to them by God: Judah. But “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” Though Babylon, the greatest power in the region, was a huge empire ranged against this tiny kingdom, in one sense there was no need to panic: God’s people had been attacked, invaded, and besieged before. They’d looked disaster in the face several times over the years—and each time their God had defended them and brought victory from the jaws of defeat. But that same God had also, through his prophets, warned of what would happen if his people continued to pay no attention to him and continued to pay no more than lip service to obeying his laws in his land.

So then came the catastrophe: “The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar’s] hand,

with some of the vessels of the house of God” (v 2). The king and a great number of the people were taken into exile in Babylon. The house of God—the temple where he had dwelled among his people—was destroyed. The Babylonian king brought the temple treasures to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed them there, in the treasury of his god (v 3).

It was the greatest crisis in the history of God’s people since Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden. From every viewpoint it looked as though the gods of the Babylonians were stronger than the God of the Bible: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After all, if the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was strong enough to protect his people, how come the Babylonians were able to come in and give them such a hiding? So the inevitable question must have arisen:

“Where is God in this?”

And we can imagine the Jews forgetting their own disobedience, and the warnings and predictions of the prophets, and asking themselves:

“Did we follow our God for nothing?”

Those must have been the questions in the minds of the parents as their children were rounded up and taken off to Babylon—to “the land of Shinar” (v 2-3). *We didn’t raise our children in the faith in order for them to be carried away like this. Our kids need to live in Judah, not in Babylon—what will become of them there? If God is good, why*

is he causing our children to have to grow up in this kind of place? After all, those Jewish parents would have known their Scriptures: Babylon, in the land of Shinar, was the place back in Genesis 11 where the Tower of Babel had been constructed. It was the place where mankind had come together to oppose God's purposes for humanity in his world, and had said, *We'll show God who is in charge of this operation: we'll build a tower for ourselves and raise it all the way up to the heavens, and we will decide what to do for ourselves.* This was where the youths of Judah were being taken. How could they survive at all—let alone survive in their faith?

I don't wish to sound alarmist, but the generations that come behind us in the church, perhaps not too far removed from us, may have occasion in our own land to say similar things. Some of us may be asking similar questions because of the circumstances of our own lives or the lives of our children right now: *What is God doing? Why are we having to live in—and why are our kids having to grow up in—this kind of place, this kind of society? If God is good, why would he let our land look like this?*

The book of Daniel is a record of what happened to God's people in the heart of an empire set up to deny and defy God: the story of the exiles told through the particular stories of four men. If and when we feel that our society is heading in a similar direction—that it looks much more like Babylon than Jerusalem, and increasingly so—this is also the story that shows us how we can live with confidence and courage in such a world.