



Croatian  
Evangelistic  
Outreach

Kneza Branimira 11  
10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
ceo@cce.hr

T+385 1 4920 726  
F +385 1 4813 871  
www.cce.hr



# BABYLONIAN MISSION

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**Mario Dučić,** **CEO Pulpit Series** is sent out monthly free of charge. If you would like to be added to our mailing list and receive these messages on a regular basis please send your request to: ceo@cce.hr

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“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king’s descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom

there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge

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and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans." (Daniel 1:1-4)

I believe God wants us to give His church a new mission, or better said; He wants to reveal to us one of the original purposes of the church, an apostolic anointing for changing society by functioning as "salt and light".

In the absence of apostolic influence, many good pastors and believers have come to a standstill and are concentrating on saving individuals or preserving the local church. If we hope to be effective we cannot stay at the same level assuming that this is the only mission of the church because without a vision for continual influence in the society and culture in which the church is found, we become just another good social club of like-minded people.

Biblical history in the book of Daniel reminds us of a dark era for God's people. Because

of disobedience and sin, around 605 B.C., they surrendered to King Nebuchadnezzar and were led away to Babylon. Among the captives were four young men: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

In order to better understand the surroundings of these young men, we must understand something of the social-political situation of Babylon, which was found between the Tigris and Euphrates connected to southeastern Mesopotamia. During the time of Babylonian history, which spans from around 1900 B.C. to its fall in 539 B.C. she was a great civilization and influenced many nations outside her borders. Her architecture was magnificent with properly laid-out streets and infamous hanging gardens adorned with beautiful colors. Her walls were most often covered with pictures and mosaics, and the Babylonian university was, in those days, very recognized. Actually, the teachers in the university uncovered many principles which we use today in many sectors such as mathematics, anatomy, and astronomy.

There were many well-known rulers of Babylon, one of which is still well-known to us today is Hammurabi who ascended to the throne in 1792 B.C. Other than the fact that he was a warrior and conqueror, he expanded the Babylonian borders and organized Babylonian laws, which we know today as "Hammurabi's Code". The Babylonian empire spread as Hammurabi took on other surrounding nations and thus began the

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golden age for the Babylonian Empire. Under his rule Babylon was a unique culture with political success. In short, the Babylonian Empire was a place of wealth, prestige, and effective governmental authority.

In these surroundings we find four young men led into Babylon, among whom one especially excelled – Daniel; who at about twenty years of age was led into Babylon as a slave.

One of the first things the Babylonians usually did to their slaves was to change their names.

“To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.” (Daniel 1:7)

In the Bible times the parents would observe the child for eight days. According to Jewish customs, if the child was a male child he would be circumcised and then named. The parents were responsible during those eight days to pray and observe their child and learn his character, according to which they would later name him. When that child would hear his name he would hear and know his destiny, history, and ability to function in God’s kingdom. Every time when he would hear his mother calling him he would remember his identity.

The Babylonians changed Daniel’s, Hananiah’s, Mishael’s, and Azariah’s names with the purpose of erasing their history and destiny in order to make them Babylonian and to better assimilate them into the culture. Daniel,

whose name means “God is my judge”, became Belteshazzar, which means “Bel, protect his life” (Bel being one of the main Babylonian gods). Hananiah, whose name meant “God has favored”, became Shadrach, which means “Command of Aku” (Aku was the moon god). Mishael, whose name meant “Who is what God is?”, became Meshach, meaning “Who is like Aku”, and Azariah, whose name meant, “Jehovah has helped”, became Abednego, meaning “Servant of Nebo” (Nebo was the god of learning and writing).

When they heard their newly acquired names their ears would ring with the sound of slavery. What is interesting here is that they accepted their new names without a lot of resistance along with a new culture while firmly resisting to be polluted by the spirits of the Babylonian culture.

In the eighth verse we read that Daniel decided ahead of time, in regards to all the temptation that awaited him, not to defile himself: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” (Daniel 1:8)

**✦ We face three options: to unite with our culture, to separate from our culture, or to change our culture!**

If we purpose in our heart ahead of time to apply ourselves to God's Word and its principles regardless of our surroundings then God can protect us and be favorable toward us. In the ninth verse, God is sympathetic toward Daniel. "Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs." (Daniel 1:9) This was so because Daniel stood firm and was obedient to his Biblical beliefs. Not only did he stand firm but he decidedly learned the language and culture of the Chaldeans with one goal – to give God glory and to bring change into that land! We notice in verses three and four that the king commanded the master of his eunuchs to teach them the language and literature of the Chaldeans: "Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom *there was* no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who *had* ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans." (Daniel 1:3-4)

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We notice here that these people were confronted with the same circumstances that we all face in this culture in which we live. We face three options: to unite with our culture, to separate from our culture, or to change our culture!

Daniel purposed in his heart to change the culture of his day and, along with God's principles, to win them for God's glory. Daniel had his own eternal mission and a clear vision – to change the culture and people around him.

### ► **1. THE CHURCH IS GOD'S WEAPON TO CHANGE CULTURES**

One of the weakest areas of the church in the previous century has been our view of biblical history and understanding of our vision. Today many long-time believers are lost, especially when we speak about how we, as Christians, have the right and responsibility to change the worldly system in which we live, whether that be spiritually, culturally, educationally, politically, or financially.

If we believe and proclaim that the earth is the Lord's then we can rightfully ask ourselves who is responsible for this earth. Believers are lost because we hold a sword in one hand and a suitcase in the other hesitating not knowing if we should openly fight or perhaps pull away.

Our answer to this question not only defines how we will spend the short life we have

on earth but it also stipulates our method of evangelism, the destiny of our church, our movement, our city, and our nation! Because, in the end, our biblical worldview will determine our life mission; if we have a wrong worldview, we will not function properly.

Unfortunately, the situation of the church today is such that many are not very appealing to their communities. They wish to separate themselves from everything; they pull within their four walls, and only expand their own kingdoms while building their own wounded egos behind their pulpits. Many believers give most of their service until marriage, after becoming married they only want to attend church, they passively listen to sermons, barely raise their hands, keep company with the television, and they complain about rules, which in most cases is their way of gaining friends.

I don't know if you've noticed, but it appears that Christianity is one world religion without any kind of goal of changing the world! Every other religion has a goal to change culture; Islam has a socialized goal, communism wanted to change nations...nearly every religion wants to change culture – except Christianity!

The mission of churches today has become good people who desire unity, love, peace, and tolerance. Many think that they can change people around them by their own goodness – but this is not the correct purpose of the church. Because in place of changing cultures, organizing quality institutions,

businesses, groups, political organizations, coalitions, daycares, schools, and projects we have become religious while trying to spiritually renew history and old methods. The church is really the only one with the power and ability to change cultures, because God has given to us all we need – He has given us power from above, wisdom, ability, help and an apostolic call to return culture to the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ! That's why it is time, like never before, to take back what belongs to us!

Lying and deceiving voices, evil spirits today, whisper, "Leave the people alone, what could you possibly do to bring change? Look at how it's all going to ruin – crime, corruption, injustice, depravity, satanic rule. Why waste your time when people don't want to be evangelized." Many today believe these voices of doom! Not only do they listen to these voices but they sign a peace agreement with Satan which says, "If you don't attack us we won't attack you." This is why Christians slip into their own goodness; they fellowship with one another hiding within their four walls where each one tries to impress others with his own level of spirituality, or perhaps

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prove to himself how spiritual he is by his own righteousness and goodness. After having signed a peace agreement, Satan will do all he can to swing the church into a kind of balance, persuading her that it is safe to remain “enclosed” in little house groups, Bible schools, seminaries, conferences; all the while lacking true reality. Behind these four walls we philosophize and pick each other to the bones! When this takes place we silently give Satan notice by saying, “Move on! You can have our culture, art, media, political structures, education system, and businesses; just leave

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us alone so we can live and die in peace.”

It is time for us to rise up like never before and put our enemies on notice. The time has come for us to get involved in our society, shake every religion and take back what belongs to us – daycares, schools, politics, the economy, media, and art.

History is filled with examples of believers who refused to involve themselves with the cultural trends of their day while passively observing Satan seizing their culture. However, in Germany there one man who loudly lifted his voice against the Nazi regime. After having spent a year and a half being shifted around to various prisons and concentration camps, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was tortured before hung at dawn on April 9, 1945 at the explicit orders of Hitler. The church, by and large, sat back and did nothing while Nazism rose to power and seized control of the German culture. The same scenario took place in Russia. In 1945 Japan fell under the power of materialism and idolatry because no one would fight for their culture. Today there are very few Christians in Japan and she considers herself a leading civilization in the world where promiscuity is socially acceptable and considered “normal”.

Today many nations around the world are caught in the trap of humanism, New Age, homosexuality, cults, “sexual freedom”, false religions, materialism; each one desiring to occupy the world. But I ask myself, where is the church in all of this? Where are the

believers who pray without ceasing?

What we must understand is that God loved Babylonians, but was against the Babylonian spirit. This is what we must fight against; we must battle the spirit of the age, the spirit with whom God's kingdom is constantly in conflict! God desires for us to break into the social and geographical arenas of Babylon, while at the same time remaining free from its spirit! God has His own weapons – they are called churches – the body of Christ! That why He is preparing us to break in and take back the culture that belongs to Him!

► **2. DANIEL HAD THREE CHOICES, ONE OF WHICH WAS TO BLEND INTO THE CULTURE.**

Blending with culture is a picture of the compromising believer whose heart is still enslaved by lust for this world. Their source of life comes from the spirit of this world; they don't just speak the language of Babylon, they eat the king's meat and drink the king's wine. They only need Jesus to fill certain ambitions and are willing to pay whatever price is necessary to reach their goals – so they sit at the king's table, enjoy the wealth surrounding him, bow to the prince of this world, and praise their freedom and tolerance! These kinds of Christians may attend church, but are still enslaved by the world's system; they have lost their voice while echoing the message of the lost multitude around them. Some have left their call for a better salary and stability

while following the majority. Unfortunately they are not leaders in Christ's mission, rather they are followers of the popular majority, they have left behind radical Christianity, and they have accepted the Babylonian culture without a desire for change. They don't realize the only way to change a culture is to become faithful in personality – in identity.

We will never be able to change our society and the people living in it if we live by the standards and principles of today. When we sit back and give way to this culture we lose the ability for change. Only the kingdom of God, in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit with submitted believers, can be an effective means for change in society! This is why Christians who are absorbed in this culture have no strength for change.

► **3. THE SECOND CHOICE IS TO SEPARATE FROM CULTURE**

Separation means to pull away from society

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because of fear. One man said: „It’s hard to celebrate the level of connection the modern church has with modern man.” Someone else said, „The first problem with today’s church is disconnection.” Unfortunately the church today is more attached to culture. We cannot show, in a rationalized way, how Christ is connected with society’s momentary condition. The only dominant church in Croatian society is Roman Catholic, which knows no time or space, or perhaps the slightly older evangelical churches who fight for their personal existence while compromising to hang on to the status quo.

Because of the constant pressure believers flee from culture, shut down, or lock themselves away; they are found, as Pentecostals often say, in their “holy huddle” – Christian ghettos, frightened by the thought of surviving the pressures of modern times.

This is the way believers react when they are not secure in their identity – that’s why their missions fail. They pull away in fear while “hanging on ‘til Jesus comes”! This is a spirit of separation; in place of separating from dead churches, dead works and dry theology,

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they separate from society while holding on their old methodologies. Churches today are filled with a spirit of cowardice which is disguised as a spirit of “man’s wisdom”, goodness, love, unity, understanding, and ecumenical tolerance.

What has happened to those of us who still calls ourselves Pentecostal? Supposedly we have a comprehension of God’s power, but we do not see the evidence of change in society and the people in it. Our spirituality and strength are hid in churches and seminars about quasi-spirituality; we even have our own internal language; we are filled with our own sensations, revelations, and visions. We live for some mysterious revival while blowing shofars around town and performing all manner of prophetic symbolisms to break curses and bring revival. We go from seminar to seminar attended by a greater number of deranged believers, all the while our children live worse than the world and divorce is continually on the rise. Where is our power for change?

▶ **4. THE CHOICE WE NEED TO MAKE IS PENETRATION!**

Daniel’s answer to Babylon was to have an open view of the culture, not to run! That’s why he learned to speak their language; he wanted to be relevant, or as we may say today, a believer who stood out in society and who concerned himself with bring change to society.

The Bible is relevant to man today and we are all responsible to answer for the culture in which we live. The kingdom of God is relevant and its message is relevant; the only problem is that the church isn't relevant! Although the church has eyes it is blind; she does not understand the message of the kingdom. This is precisely why we are not relevant in our outward presentation. The church that receives and understands the word of Jesus Christ is led in outward presentation in society!

In the church there ought to be disciples from all nationalities, meaning that we must detach from our own subculture and begin affecting the world of business, politics, sports, education, science, entertainment, and media. This means that we need to carry the gospel outside the church buildings into our society and culture in order to change it.

"And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" (Matthew 28:18-20)

Christ wants for us to make disciples of all the nations! And that is what the early church did. After the Holy Spirit descended, the disciples went out of the upper room

with new power and in God's glory. That first generation alone disrupted and turned society upside down. They stood before governors and said, "We are here to make Jesus' disciples of all people – no exceptions!" They showed them God's plan for mankind and entered into the culture of that day full of courage, wisdom, passion and love for the lost because they were submitted to a greater mission – to make disciples of all nations!

The Bible is not just a handbook for salvation of people rather a handbook for renewal of society – a handbook for reconstruction of government and civilization!

Daniel gained great access; he studied at the Babylonian university in order to understand their way of thinking, their principles, and how to slowly break into the culture to bring change. We can say about Daniel that in a good way he became embodied by that culture. Just as Jesus, who was able to change mankind in the same measure that he was involved with mankind. It has always been something the clergy and theologian could not understand, and so they

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complained and asked all the more why He fellowshiped with sinners. But it is miraculous that God, who is without sin, clothed himself in human form in order to identify with the ones he wished to redeem. That's why the prophet Isaiah said: "he was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12b). He could not save them until he came into contact with them; he had to contact the woman at the well in order to reach her! She said to him, "Why do you, a Jew, speak with me, a Samaritan? My culture is so different from yours, but it is as if you are putting yourself in my culture, which is an enemy to yours, in order to reach me." This is called Biblical embodiment! In the same way, Jesus had to hang on the cross in order to save thief next to him; he had to sit with Zaccheus, the tax-collector, in order to change his life.

E.H. Peterson, the translator of *The Message Bible* translates John 1:14 this way, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood."

Embodiment for us as Christians means that we are the best workers, students, doctors, politicians, athletes, and journalists in order to change society. We must go outside the

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church walls to influence and save our society. Spirituality is not reading the Bible day and night, prayer day and night, or attending Christian seminars, rather it is being an influential person.

Do we want to change culture? If so, we must go out among people! People will not come into the church, so instead we must go out to where they are! We must eat with sinners, study with sinners, and work among sinners! Unfortunately, we sometimes run away from them or fail to make time for them because of our own activities; sometimes we only want to fellowship with Christians. Jesus drew people to Himself, the very people we run away from. His friends were tax-collectors, adulterers, and thieves. He did not partake of their sin nor did He have an identity crisis because He knew He was the Son of God.

We will have time to fellowship with each other and attend seminars in heaven with the righteous of various nationalities and denominations for all eternity; but for now it is time for a very important job, to make disciples.

It is not enough to know only the subject matter of the gospel; we must know the language of those we are here to serve. For example, the apostle Paul, who was a doctor of theology, a Pharisee among Pharisees, had a good grasp of Christian vernacular; but while he knew how to speak about the Old Testament with the religious Jews he also knew how to speak the language of

his culture. He knew how to speak with the religious and the pagans. He was a bi-lingual Christian! By that I don't mean bi-lingual as in English and Spanish; I mean the language of the church and the language of the culture in which we live.

In Acts we see the Apostle Paul speaking in the Synagogues with the Jews, philosophers, theologians, scientists, kings and athletes. He never felt uneasy. He was able to fellowship with anyone because no one was able to destroy his identity or sense of worth for he was firm in his faith. He was even able to recite their poets when he said, "For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."" (Acts 17:28) Paul always sought some connection between himself and his listeners. He didn't just recite to the pagans the Old Testament; he sought something from their culture that would help them connect to the truth.

If you wish to reach your culture for Jesus Christ you must live "embodied" in their life so you can identify and use whatever means you can to reach those with whom you are in contact. That's why Paul said, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward

God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9:19-27)

In other words, there is a great job ahead of us, we cannot be lazy. Read the newspapers, read books, educate yourself, exercise discipline,

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become a good student, and be an expert in your field. Do not only read the Bible; because according to my experience those who are not in touch with the world around them end up in mental institutions and live deranged lives.

Although Daniel served under three kings (under Nebuchadnezzar he governed all the Babylonian provinces, under Belshazzar he became the third ruler of his kingdom, and under Darius he was one of his three representatives) he still found daily time to pray; in fact, he prayed three times a day.

“...he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before His God, as was his custom since early days.” (Daniel 6:10b)

You will always find time to do the things you love! We can find time for personal godliness, prayer, reading the Bible, church, and service to God if we want; the question is whether we

want to! This means that we must roll up our sleeves and get busy – build bridges between people and God – not just to connect with the culture, but to draw people with us into God’s kingdom.

God is raising up a new generation of Daniels who will go into and take possession of the society in which they live and change their culture for Jesus Christ. Do you want to be a part of that, or do you simply want to be a quasi-spiritual being without lasting and effective results? There is no other choice for us!

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