

Mishael's Misnomer  
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Neh 8:4

(BHS)	(NASB)
וַיַּעֲמֵד עֶזְרָא הַסֹּפֵר עַל־מַגְדָּל־עֵץ	1 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium
אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לְדָבָר	2 which they had made for the purpose.
וַיַּעֲמֵד אֵצְלוֹ	3 And beside him stood
מַתִּיתִיָּה וְשֵׁמַע וְעֲנַיָּה וְאוּרִיָּה	4 Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah,
וְחִלְקִיָּה וּמַעֲשִׂיָּה עַל־יְמִינוֹ	5 Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand;
וּמִשְׁמָאֵלוֹ	6
פְּדַיָּה וּמִישָׂאֵל וּמַלְחִיָּה וְחַשׁוּם	7 and Pedaiiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum,
וְחַשְׁבַּדְנָה וְזַכְרְיָה וְמֶשׁוּלָם:	8 Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam
	9 on his left hand.

Obviously lines 6 and 9 relate in NASB. There are 14 names here, all of which can be read just by sounding it out. When I teach Hebrew, the first thing I do is explain how to pronounce the letters. We then go to genealogies and read them. So right away, the students can read whole verses of Hebrew. Anyway, many of the other words are first year vocab, like scribe, tree (wood), which, make, etc. Note that “right hand” is yamin, as in Ben-jamin.

The most interesting name there is in red: **Mishael**. I wonder if he is *the* Mishael. You know who I mean. You know his story. But his moniker is quite the misnomer. The epithet he was given is how you know him, as inappropriate as it is. Mishael is none other than the famous statesman: Meshach. As in, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 1:7). Mishael means, “Who is what God is?” It was changed to something like, “Who is what Aku is?” A good Hebrew name was replaced with a pagan one. As I said, Meshach is a misnomer.

Okay, well, what is he doing listed in Nehemiah 8? You may remember that Nehemiah 8 is one of the high points of redemptive history. The Jews had returned from exile, rebuilt the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and reestablished the community of faith. They gathered together and stood to hear the Law read to them, and they were devoted to keeping it. And the amazing thing is that, among the returned exiles, was Mishael! Daniel and Hananiah (Shadrach) were also there (Neh 10:6, 23). (Don't bother too much about calculating their age. The Temple was destroyed c. 586, and Cyrus' decree was c. 539, only 47 years later. Daniel and company may have only been in their late 50s.) Apparently, as soon as Cyrus allowed it, the faithful Jews from the book of Daniel returned home (Dan 1:21).

There is no clear indication of this in the book of Daniel. It ends with them apparently still in exile. But we can extend their story with the book of Nehemiah and see that not only did they return, they returned with the same zeal for God and his holiness, for the things of God and keeping their identities with Yahweh, as we see on display in the fiery furnace and the lion's den. These faithful men were blessed with being able to see the fulfillment of prophecy and the great salvation of the Jews returning to the Promised Land.

Jesus also got to see the fruit of his suffering. "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied" (Isa 53:11a). "For the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). Like the return to the Land followed the exile, Jesus' resurrection followed his Passion. The patient endurance of God's people follows the pattern of Christ. There is an end to longsuffering, a good end, a blessed end.

Today you may find fidelity to God most costly. You may have lost much. At the very minimum, you are willing to give of your substance to the church—that you could have kept. You give of your time to study the word and pray—that you could have spent on other things. You refrain from all manner of sins—that you could have enjoyed. You suffer the disdain of unbelievers. At the other end of the spectrum is persecution, imprisonment for the gospel, harsh treatment for the name of Christ, even death.

They tried to change Mishael's identity. They gave him a false name. And the world will try to change you, too. But after that is over, the Day will come when all you have willingly suffered and given away will be vindicated. So hold on. Don't forget who you are, in the midst of this world. And someday, you will stand with the saints in the great assembly. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!