

# The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. (Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. (Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

## **Faithful in a Foreign Land**

**January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Daniel 1**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Daniel 1.

I confess to you this morning that I have not watched any of the Rocky movies, but I am familiar with one of the famous Rocky quotes. He says: “It ain’t about how hard you hit. It’s about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward.”

The Book of Daniel is written by a man who has been hit. His world has been flipped upside down. He’s living in a foreign land, under a foreign King, and any outsider looking in would see that Daniel’s situation was all but hopeless.

But, as we will discover in this amazing Book, that’s not what Daniel sees. Daniel sees beyond the momentary trials and the temporary powers that afflict him. What does Daniel see? He sees a God who is Lord over history. He sees a Son of Man who will one day receive dominion and glory and honour. He sees HOPE, and that hope fuels him to live a life of faithfulness in a foreign land.

My prayer for us this morning is that we will be helped to see what Daniel sees so that we will be helped to live as Daniel lived. Look with me now at Daniel 1. Hear now God’s holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. <sup>3</sup> Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, <sup>4</sup> youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them

the literature and language of the Chaldeans.<sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. <sup>6</sup> Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. <sup>7</sup> And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. <sup>9</sup> And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, <sup>10</sup> and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." <sup>11</sup> Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." <sup>14</sup> So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. <sup>15</sup> At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. <sup>16</sup> So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. <sup>17</sup> As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. <sup>18</sup> At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. <sup>20</sup> And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. <sup>21</sup> And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. (Daniel 1:1-21 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

As we consider the text before us this morning, there are three things that I see that I want to highlight – three details that summarize the drama and the wisdom of this first chapter in Daniel.

### What We Find In The Text

The first thing that we find is:

#### 1. A sovereign God

In order to appreciate today's text as we should, we need to spend a moment to frame this historically. This event – the Babylonian exile – is perhaps THE LOWWATER MARK in the Old Testament. A few weeks ago we talked about the highwater mark in Israel's history, do you remember that? Under the reign of Solomon, God's people dwelt in the promised land and they had peace on every side. Under Solomon's supervision, they built the temple and God's presence dwelt there with His people. Nations came to Israel to see and benefit from their wealth and wisdom. That was the HIGH WATER mark in their history.

But then something happened.

Solomon married many foreign wives, and he worshiped their foreign gods, and as soon as he took his eyes off of God he began to sink. Just like Peter when he was called out of the boat. Just like you and I in our day to day lives. God holds it all together, but Israel forgot that, and they began to look elsewhere.

The story that follows describes Israel's tragic spiral into sin and ruin. Every once in a while a leader would rise up who would point the people back in the right direction, but the decline was too steep – the freefall was too rapid – to be stopped.

God warned his people again and again that they needed to turn back to Him. He sent prophet after prophet to call them to repentance. But they did not listen. And so, in verse 2 we read:

And **the Lord gave** Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. (Daniel 1:2a ESV)

Do you see that? "The Lord gave." Those three words set the stage for this entire Book.

An outside spectator would look in and say: "Wow! The King of Babylon is wiping the floor with the Israelites!" But Daniel looks at the same event and says: "The sovereign God is disciplining His children, just like He said He would."

God brought Babylon to Israel. God allowed the Babylonian army to overtake Jerusalem. God oversaw the events that saw the kidnapping of the Israelite youth and the ransacking of the temple. He was working His purposes for good even as men were working their purposes for evil.

This is one of the mysteries of God that we cannot summarize in a carefully written treatise: We are responsible for the things that we do, but we don't do a **THING** apart from the sovereign hand of God. How do we hold those truths together? It is a profound mystery, but we see it all over the Bible.

In the midst of Israel's greatest defeat, Daniel looks up and sees God's hand all over it. You might feel like you are a victim of circumstances that are outside of your control, but you need to know this morning that **NONE** of those circumstances are outside of God's control.

Not one of them. As one commentator states it:

To be in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar is not to be out of the control of God.<sup>1</sup>

This is the heart of the entire Book of Daniel. God is Lord over all! Every political power! Every enemy! Every lion! Every furnace! He's Lord over everything!

And here, the first thing that we find in this text is the Sovereign Lord of all using the mighty nation of Babylon to put his backsliding children on a timeout. He knows exactly what we need.

Second, we find:

## **2. A Courageous Teenager**

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel – World Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 22.

The Babylonian exile was actually a three-part event, that culminated in 586 BC when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, burnt down the temple and brought all of the remaining captives to Babylon. But Daniel here describes the first stage. In 605 BC, the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem the first time. In this first invasion, the Babylonians went through the city of Jerusalem and accumulated the best and the brightest young men. They then brought these men to Babylon to receive extensive training. The idea behind this method is relatively straightforward – they wanted to subtly subvert the Jewish culture by teaching these young leaders to think like Babylonians.

To add insult to injury, the young Jewish men who had been taken were stripped of their former names and given names that were intended to exalt the Babylonian gods. Daniel – whose name means “My judge is God” was renamed Belteshazzar which roughly means “Nebo, protect his life”. Hananiah – whose name means “Yahweh has shown grace” was renamed Shadrach which means “The command of Aku.” Mishael – whose name means “Who is what God is?” was renamed Meshach which means “Who is what Aku is?” and Azariah – whose name means “God has helped” was renamed Abednego which means “servant of Nebo.”<sup>2</sup>

These teenage boys were placed with the eunuchs, which means that they were castrated. They were forced to learn the language of their captors and to study the Babylonian wisdom literature. This story begins in a very dark place. But, after seven verses describing the complete and utter defeat that the Israelites had experienced, we read:

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. (Daniel 1:8 ESV)

This is a remarkable verse! Daniel has been kidnapped, robbed of his identity, emasculated and immersed in pagan literature. But here in verse 8, in the midst of an embarrassing, humiliating defeat, we hear the voice of a young Jewish teenager in the palace of Babylon, and he says:

“No.”

Up until this point Daniel hasn't offered any resistance. But here, as Daniel and the rest of the Jewish captives are asked to eat the king's food Daniel draws a line.

“No. I have jumped through your hoops, and I have studied your books but I will not eat from your table.”

Why did he draw the line here?

It's not as simple as you might think. Many argue that Daniel drew the line here because of Jewish dietary laws. But that can't be the case here because the Jewish dietary restrictions do not prohibit wine. Others argue that the meat and the wine were refused because they were likely used in worship to the Babylonian idols, but so too were the vegetables so that doesn't solve our problem.

So, why did he draw the line here? I would agree with one commentator who suggests:

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<sup>2</sup> See Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Daniel – Minor Prophets)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 7, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 34.

The defilement he feared was not so much a ritual as a moral defilement, arising from the subtle flattery of gifts and favours which entailed hidden implications of loyal support...<sup>3</sup>

Daniel, in a sense, refuses to enter onto the Babylonian pay roll. He wants it to be clear that he is living and serving in Babylon, but he does not BELONG to Babylon. He belongs to another world – he serves another King – and he will not sacrifice his distinctiveness. At the risk of possibly his life and certainly his position, Daniel refuses to eat the King's food.

The chief eunuch is horrified by this proposition. If Daniel and his friends began to lag behind the other servants and the King discovered that they were permitted to eat their own diet, the chief eunuch would certainly lose his head. Yet, miraculously, he agrees to allow Daniel to undergo a ten-day test.

So, for ten days, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah ate nothing but vegetables, and, after ten days had passed, not only were Daniel and his friends on par with the other servants – they had far surpassed them!

There is blessing in obedience! God honours these young men for drawing a line and refusing to cross it. We should learn from the example of these men, and particularly from the example of Daniel – the courageous teenager who refused to eat from the King's table.

Third and finally, we find:

### **3. A Temporary Power**

Now, this is one of the details that you would certainly blow past in your first reading of the Bible. Let me help you see it.

At the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Babylon had become the greatest empire in the world. Prior to Babylon, the Assyrians claimed this title but, in June of the year 605 B.C. at the battle of Carcamesh, Babylon decisively defeated the Egyptian-Assyrian alliance and proved to be THE world power. This same year, Daniel and his friends were kidnapped and brought to Babylon so they were essentially on the scene for day one of this formidable new force.

But look with me at verse 21:

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. (Daniel 1:21 ESV)

Cyrus was the King of the Persians – he was the King of the nation that overthrew Babylon 70 years after Babylon's ascension to power. And Daniel WAS STILL THERE TO SEE IT!

Daniel witnessed the rise and the fall of an empire.

I imagine it seemed all but impossible in those early days to envision a day when Babylon would be overthrown – not after they had just defeated Assyria AND Egypt and had made Israel look like FLEAS! Nebuchadnezzar had even plundered the temple – he had stolen from GOD – and it looked like he had gotten away with it! He looked invincible!

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<sup>3</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series* (Madison, WI: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 83.

But things can change a lot in 70 years. 70 years is nothing. God's laying out a plan that will stretch on through to eternity.

Daniel watched as kings rose and he watched as kings fell. He saw those who thought themselves to be invincible succumb to the same future that awaits all of humanity.

Friends, don't put your trust in princes, and don't let them have your fear either. Men and women – even the most fierce and powerful – are dust. They are here today and gone tomorrow. Let's commit ourselves to spending less time worrying about who will win the next election and more time praying about how we can live in a way that glorifies God REGARDLESS of who holds temporary power over us.

With that in mind, I want to spend our final moments thinking about how we can be faithful in a foreign land.

### **How To Be Faithful In A Foreign Land**

I want to close this morning with some quick implications that flow from our text. First of all, if you want to be faithful in a foreign land, then:

#### **1. Don't let temporary defeats disable you**

I imagine that, for many of these young Israelite men, the deportation to Babylon absolutely annihilated their faith. As they marched away in chains and looked back at an occupied Jerusalem, how many men resigned themselves to a life of despair?

They were surrounded by enemies. The life they once knew was in shambles. They were strangers living in a foreign land. Has anyone here ever felt that way?

Here's the more important question: How did you RESPOND when you felt that way? That's the question that matters. That's the question that Jesus is concerned with. He is not surprised by our trials and tribulations. No, Jesus himself said:

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33b ESV)

Life is HARD sometimes! Life knocks you DOWN sometimes! God is not surprised by that. God is Lord OVER that. And he is chiefly concerned with how we respond to the trials that we face. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, Jesus walks through the churches and he inspects them. Who are the ones who receive the prize? Do you remember?

**To the one who conquers** I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:7b ESV)

Friend, are you a conqueror? If we are going to live faithfully in a foreign land then we are going to need to grow in our resiliency. Have you tapped out? Have you thrown in the towel?

Get back up. By the grace of God, and for the glory of God, don't let these setbacks disable you for the task that God has set apart for you. Let's take a lesson from our brother Daniel.

Second and finally:

## 2. Draw a line and don't cross it

This is THE point of application in today's passage. Daniel and his friends were immersed in a pagan world and they prayerfully and resolutely drew a line and refused to cross it. The reality is that in every generation God's people have to figure out how to be in the world without being of the world. This is HARD! When Jesus prayed for us in his high priestly prayer, he mentioned this difficulty in particular. He prayed:

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:15-16 ESV)

Do you hear that? Jesus essentially asked the Father that we would have wisdom in figuring out where to draw the lines.

Now if you draw the lines too narrowly then you risk sabotaging your outreach to the culture. Jesus criticised the Jews of his day for doing this. You won't do this and you won't do that – so you can't have any contact with your Gentile neighbours – how in the world are you ever going to serve as a kingdom of priests? Right? If you hide your candle under a bushel then how are you going to light up a room?

But on the other hand – he also said that salt that loses its saltiness is good for nothing – thrown out into the streets and trampled under foot – so it's pretty important that we figure this out. Where are we going to draw the lines?

Some of us in this room are tempted to draw unhelpfully narrow lines. Sometimes you meet people who think you've crossed a line if you read anything but the King James Version or if your young men come to church without a tie. That's an unhelpfully narrow line, and it tends to push folks away pretty quickly. That's not helpful.

But I suspect that, for most of us in this room, we have drawn lines that are too broad – if we've even drawn lines at all. I've been to Christian gatherings where the discussions and the jokes sounded exactly like everything I would hear at a gathering of unbelievers. For many of us, we just do whatever the culture is doing – and it's killing us. We have to have some lines! This whole sex and gender thing – is madness. It is literally killing kids and we need to say NO. Sorry, we can't go along with that. We're drawing a line here. Boys are boys. Girls and girls and sex is great between one man and one woman who are going to stay together and love each other forever.

Period.

Lovingly, but firmly, that's a line that we need to draw.

But good lines are hard to find – so like Daniel and his friends – we have to work together and we have to choose the right ones.

God help us – because this is really hard – but here we see that this is one of the things that God's people need to figure out when they are living in a hostile land. Jesus knew this would be hard, and he prayed for us – that we would get this right.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>4</sup> This point is borrowed extensively from Pastor Paul's manuscript.

Brothers and sisters, we have a tremendous opportunity in front of us. When Jesus commissioned his disciples he called them to go out into all the nations and here we are! We are living in the midst of a nation that is separated from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The mission field is right outside our door.

Of course it's hard! We are living in a foreign land.

So, here's a question to consider as we close: Will you choose to see this foreign land as an opportunity to shine the glory of God in a dark place? Or will you see it as a monster that you need to hide your kids from?

Will we hide in holy huddles and wait for the rapture? Or will we go forth into the world as salt and light – proclaiming a glorious gospel and living distinct and compelling lives?

Daniel and his friends were so enamored with the truth that – even though they were compelled to study the wisdom of Babylon – they were able to hold fast! We CAN be faithful in a foreign land! Our kids CAN flourish! Our witness CAN shine. We learn all of that in this glorious text!

Let's commit ourselves once again to live with courage and faithfulness, regardless of where God places us. For the glory of God, and for the advancement of His Kingdom both here and to the ends of the earth, this is the life He has called us to. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.