

DANIEL

Part 1: “Faithfulness in a Foreign World”

Daniel 1

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Summary

Join us as Pastor David A. Ritchie begins a thought-provoking journey through the Book of Daniel, and we learn about the theme of “Faithfulness in a Foreign World.” In this sermon, we will discover how Daniel and his friends resisted Babylon's influence and maintained their commitment to God. Learn about the hidden power of the world and how spiritual practices can help you stay faithful. 📺🔍

Scripture Reading

“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 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. 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, 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. 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. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 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. 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. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, 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.” Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, “Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 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.” So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days” (Daniel 1:1–14).

Introduction

“Home” is a powerful word.

Home means the place we find safety, comfort, and rest. It is the refuge where we can drop our masks and be ourselves. It is the place where we don't have to pretend or perform. While many of us may yearn for excitement and the thrill of exploring a new place, at the end of our those adventures and journeys, we all long for the peace and rest and satisfaction that we can only experience in the place we call *home*.

But for many, the word home is also tinged with pain and loss of homelessness. I think of the many refugees who are our neighbors here in the city of Amarillo, Texas. For them, home is a memory of something that was taken away by war, violence, and oppression. Now, they find themselves navigating a new life in a new place that speaks a new language.

As much less severe level, many of us can relate with a much more subtle sense of estrangement. Perhaps as the world changes and shifts around you, you have felt increasingly unsettled and disoriented. Our world is increasingly divided and unpredictable and scary. So even though you may have lived a relatively safe and comfortable life, in recent years, you may feel your world is feeling less and less like home.

The Bible has a term for that sense of alienation and estrangement—that term is “*exile*.” In fact, the theme of exile and how God's people are to navigate life within exile is one of the Bible's most dominant and enduring themes.

Scripture tells us how humanity was originally created to dwell in the Garden of Eden, a place where we shared unbroken fellowship with God, peace with one another, and harmony with all of creation. But Eden was more than a garden. It was the very archetype and model of what we feel and envision when we think of *home*.

But when sin entered the world, that sense of home was shattered. Since then, humankind has been in a state of spiritual *exile*.

The story of Old Testament Israel, God's chosen people, is in many ways an echo of that same tale of exile from Eden. The people of Israel were called and set apart to inhabit a Promised Land where they could worship God, commune with Him, and bear witness to His glory among the nations. However, rather than living distinctively from the pagan nations around them, they often adopted the same practices of idolatry and injustice. As a result, God's judgment fell upon them, and they were sent into exile. They lost their home and were instead scattered into and across foreign lands.

In many ways, that story plays out every day in our sin-fractured world. We sin, and we are sinned against. Sin estranges us from God and from one another. Sin is the ultimate root cause of all exile.

But the Bible is not merely a narrative of judgment and exile. It is primarily a story of redemption and homecoming. The Bible points us to the hope of a Messiah king who has promised to make all things new—and the people of God are called to live in light of that hope.

Perhaps you find yourself today in a place of spiritual exile. Maybe you feel like you've lost your sense of home, and the world around you seems increasingly chaotic and overwhelming. It may appear as though the forces of a sinful and broken world are winning. It may seem like culture is growing darker by the day, leaving you feeling more and more alienated.

If that resonates with you, I want you to know that the book of Daniel is for you.

In the coming weeks, we will embark on a journey through the Old Testament book of Daniel. This book tells the story of an Old Testament prophet who spent most of his life in exile. Yet, Daniel's life is not just a story—it's a profound lesson for us in our own cultural moment.

Now, typically, we preach through books of the Bible one verse at a time, but with Daniel, we will approach it differently. We will organize this series as an eight-week *survey*. Instead of a line-by-line study, we'll take a step back to look at the major events, teachings, and themes of the book as a whole.

Daniel is about how we are called to live as God's people, even in a time of exile. Daniel is about having the vision to see our world and our place in this world in light of who God has revealed himself to be and the hope of his kingdom that is coming. So, today, we will examine the first chapter of Daniel and the beginning of Daniel's story. And as we delve deeper, we will learn what it means to be a people of **"Faithfulness in a Foreign World."**

Exposition

1.) Understand the Hidden Power of this World

To live faithfully in exile, we must first recognize the hidden power that a foreign world exerts over us—a power that often operates in subtle and imperceptible ways. And the beginning of Daniel Chapter 1 shows us how that power works.

Daniel's story begins within the historical backdrop of the Neo-Babylonian empire [show **Map of Neo-Babylonian Empire**], which was based out of modern-day Iraq and reigned over the region we call the Middle East about roughly six hundred years before the time of Christ. While this empire may not have endured as long as some other ancient civilizations on the world stage, Babylon occupies a monumental place in the biblical narrative. It represents far more than a nation in the ancient Middle East—it is a living symbol of the wickedness of worldly kingdoms.

Indeed, from Genesis to Revelation, Babylon consistently stands as a symbol of the kingdom of this world. The early verses of Daniel 1 even subtly allude to the Genesis account. In these verses, we witness the holy city of Jerusalem under siege by a pagan warlord and king named Nebuchadnezzar. Rather than obliterating the city, humiliate them and forces them to submit to him. He confiscates sacred vessels from the Temple of God and carries off the next generation of Jerusalem's leaders to Babylon.

But it's not just Babylon he transports them to—it's the "land of Shinar" (Dan 1:2). And Shinar isn't just a geographical region; it's the very place where the Bible sets the construction of the Tower of Babel (see Gen 11:2) [show image of [The Tower of Babel](#)].

Genesis depicts the tower of Babel as the place people gather together in a united attempt to exalt the city of man unto the place of God in heaven. For this reason, the Lord casts judgment upon Babel by dividing the languages of the builders and scattering them across the world into their various nations.

But though ancient Babel itself is briefly abandoned, it will rise again in the kingdom of Babylon and the many subsequent versions of Babylon-like empires that will follow in violent tales of human history. And like Babel, the empires of men will each seek to make a name for themselves and exalt their figurative towers into the heavens where only God belongs.

The Babylon of Daniel's time, therefore, is not merely a kingdom; it is the reincarnation of Babel. It stands as an altar to human power and glory, elevating the kingdom of man to a place reserved for God alone. Babylon embodies a way of life that rejects the lordship of God and exalts the wickedness, injustice, cruelty, and brutality all for the sake of earthly power and glory.

The power of Babylon manifests in the power of the sword—stealing, oppressing, killing, and breaking the will of the weak until they submit. This is precisely what happened to the kingdom of Judah. Yet, Daniel 1 shows us Babylon's mode of conquest isn't confined to brute force alone—Babylon also wields the for more subtle and far more effective power of slow seduction.

This is why Babylon coveted the best of Jerusalem's youth, targeting the most gifted, the most attractive, highly educated, and those of royal and noble lineage. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon didn't kidnap them to humiliate them. His strategy was to give them pleasure and power in order to bend their loyalty towards himself and his empire.

To achieve this, he established a type of comprehensive three-year master's program for these captives. Under his prescribed curriculum, the captives would immerse themselves in the language, literature, and culture of Babylon, adopt Babylonian names, and enjoy the luxuries of the royal court.

However, this wasn't an act of Babylonian benevolence; it was merely the next phase in Babylon's conquest of God's people—an assimilation program aimed at enticing them to abandon their heritage, their faith, and their allegiance to the Lord and His promises.

This, too, is how the world's power seeks to shape us today. While some may fear a day when governments might force Christians to forsake their faith, I believe a more insidious and hidden danger lurks—the slow, unconscious seduction of Christians into living, speaking, and thinking just like the world.

In other words, we should not be afraid that the government will forcefully take away Christians' right to worship God. The far greater fear that no force would be necessary. The world would not need to suppress Christianity when many believers willingly embrace a lifestyle indistinguishable from the world. Christianity would never need to become illegal if it simply can become irrelevant, as we frenetically busy ourselves and forsake our spiritual lives.

Nebuchadnezzar didn't want forced compliance from his Jewish detainees. He wanted comfortable captives. He wanted the hearts of the Jewish youth to be formed by the stories of Babylon instead of the stories of the Bible. He wanted them to adopt new rhythms and habits that would slowly form them to become so fluent in the language and customs of their new kingdom that their old ways were not forced out but merely forgotten.

There is a haunting warning in all of this. Our habits shape our affections and desires. And if we let it, the hidden power of this world will form our desires and our hope and our allegiances to the kings and kingdoms and comforts of this world.

What are your habits teaching your heart to long for? What loves are your habits imparting to your family? What is forming your language, your imagination, and your sense of identity? Is it God and His calling for you, or is the hidden power of this world that's shaping who you are?

2.) Determine to Resist Compromise

So how should we, as the people of God, respond to the powerful forces of this world that seek to shape us?

Consider the story of young Jewish aristocrats who were forcibly removed from their homes and native land by one of the greatest military powers of their time. Imagine their fear of slavery or imprisonment in Babylon. Then imagine their sudden shock and relief at being able to enjoy a meal from the king's table or having access to the halls of power, rubbing shoulders with the empire's influential figures. It's safe to say that this newfound privilege would make anyone feel special and important. Being handpicked for an elite educational program with a guaranteed government job would seem like a dream come true.

In such circumstances, it would be tempting to forget and forsake one's old culture and values. The allure of the new Babylonian identity and the seduction of pleasure and power that surrounded them would be hard to resist. Indeed, many of the Jewish youths who were relocated to Babylon no doubt succumbed to these temptations.

Yet, among these young exiles from Judah, four young men made a determined stand against the enchantments that threatened to lead them astray from their true calling.

Their names were Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the central figure of this story, Daniel. But from the moment these young men are introduced, Babylon attempts to rename them. The text states, *"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"* (Dan 1:7).

This act of renaming was not merely an attempt to help these young men fit into Babylonian culture; it was an effort to reshape their identities at their very core.

You see, the names of these Jewish men held deep spiritual significance. In fact, each of their names were declarations of worship to the Lord God of Israel. The name Daniel literally means *"God is my strength,"* Hananiah means *"Yahweh is gracious,"* Mishael means *"who is like my God?"* and Azariah means *"Yahweh is my help."* These names served as reminders of who God had revealed Himself to be and how God's people were to find their identity in Him.

However, Babylon desired to strip away these identities rooted in the Lord God of Israel, and instead anchor them in the Babylonian empire. For the names they were given were not religiously neutral—they were connected to the false gods and idols of Babylon.

So, too, if you are a Christian, you need to know that your truest identity is not your family background, your ethnicity, your sin, or your past. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, you have been given a new name and identity! You have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ! You have been adopted into the very family of God! You have been baptized and immersed into the triune name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! That is who you are.

However, we live in a world that is hard at work to make you forget your true name. We too live in a Babylon that would have us place our identities in the idols of our culture. And sure, our culture does not worship ancient Near East idols with names like Baal and Marduk and Shamash. But our culture worships the idols of sex and sexuality, so much so that, for many, sex and sexuality has become their very identity. Our culture worships the idols of money and success, so much so that our paycheck and our material wealth can become the measure of our self-worth and value. Our culture so worships power that our political team often determines who we idolize and who we are willing to demonize.

Make no mistake: our new Babylon still wants to rename you.

However, Daniel and his friends were resolute in resisting compromise with the world around them. While they couldn't control what others called them, they were fully aware of how Babylon sought to shape them, and they remembered their true names.

So, practically, how did they do this? They made an unexpected request—they asked for *different food*. While everyone else indulged in the king's meat and wine, Daniel requested permission to consume only simple vegetables and water. Our text reads: *"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. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs"* (Dan 1:8–9).

This request was surprising because in ancient culture, daily meat consumption was a privilege reserved only for the wealthy and powerful. It was like willingly turning down a Kobe Beef steak and a glass of Chateau Margaux in favor of a simple salad and tap water. But Daniel had a good reason for this request.

You see, Nebuchadnezzar wasn't just a king—he was also the high priest of Bel-Marduk, the patron god of Babylon. That means food on King Nebuchadnezzar's table wasn't just prepared in a kitchen—it was offered on the altars of Babylon's false gods. Likewise, the wine would have been consecrated as a drink offering in pagan sacrifice. In Daniel's eyes, this food was defiled, and partaking in it would be akin to participating in idol worship.

More importantly, every time Daniel chose to eat vegetables and drink water with his friends, he was reaffirming his true identity and his commitment to God. Since eating was a daily habit, he and his friends were reminded of their conviction to be loyal to the Lord multiple times each day.

Likewise, in our journey of faith, we need to evaluate the rhythms and habits of our lives. Are they nurturing our love for God or gradually bending our affections toward the idols of this world? This should involve making conscious choices about the media we consume, the company we keep, and the activities we engage in.

Moreover, we must resolve to recommit ourselves to spiritual disciplines like daily prayer and Bible reading, not as a means to earn favor but as practices that remind us of our identity in Christ. Just as Daniel resisted compromise and sought faithfulness in fellowship with his friends, we must embrace Christian community and regular corporate worship to keep our hearts centered on God.

3.) Trust in the Faithfulness of God

From an objective standpoint, Daniel's diet plan does not make sense. In terms of simple nutrition, one would expect that Daniel and his friends would wither and wilt if they abstained from the royal diet. Furthermore, the eunuch (or steward) appointed by the king to oversee them had every incentive to dissuade them from their chosen path.

After all, this royal steward had been entrusted with the care of these young men, overseeing their schedules, education, and diet. This was no small responsibility because Daniel and his friends were not just captives—they were valuable assets of the state. Babylon had invested significant resources in them, anticipating that they would serve the empire in the long run. If these young men fell ill or fell behind, the steward's own livelihood—and perhaps even his life—would be at risk. So despite his personal respect for Daniel, the steward had no intention of allowing him to proceed with his seemingly bizarre plan.

What then should Daniel do in the face of such challenges? Should he abandon his commitment to faithfulness, thinking, “Well, we tried”? Should he and his friends resort to sneakily discarding unwanted food, like a child hides uneaten Brussels sprouts in their napkin? Or should they go even further and contemplate armed rebellion?

No, Daniel chooses none of these options. Instead, he humbly submits to the authority placed over him and uses his wisdom to negotiate a mutually beneficial course of action. He proposes a ten-day trial period during which he and his friends would eat according to their convictions and values. At the end of this period, they would be examined, tested, and compared to their peers, allowing the official to decide the best course of action.

Ten days passed, and when the royal official examined Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, he observed that they were stronger and healthier than those who had eaten from the king's table. Consequently, they were permitted to continue their meal plan for the duration of their training. Moreover, God favored and protected them.

As young men, Daniel and his friends could see what others couldn't—the hidden power of Babylon attempting to lead them astray, and they chose to live by their vision. Consequently, the Lord blessed them with supernatural wisdom and insight. Daniel would be given the ability to understand visions and dreams, and his friends would receive knowledge and favor.

The end of chapter 1 reads, *“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. 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. 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. 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. And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus”* (Dan 1:17–21).

Daniel and his friends kept their commitment to their God, and as a result, God kept them as His people. Daniel lived in Babylon, but he refused to be of Babylon. In fact, he would become a prophet of God whose life and influence would outlast even the Babylonian Empire because his true allegiance lay with a kingdom that knows no end.

Conclusion

Today, we too live as exiles in a foreign land, just as Daniel did. We dwell in the kingdoms of this world, among its rulers and systems. Though the idols have changed their names, we still live in a world that worships idols that relentlessly seek to shape and malform us. Yet, our citizenship belongs to a different and far superior kingdom.

Like Daniel and his friends, we are at a crossroads. Will we have the eyes to see the world and the powers of the world? Will we be able to choose faithfulness over compromise? Will we be able to trust that our God will be faithful to bless and keep us?

Like the ancient exiles of God's people, we too are called to live with the anticipation that one day we will be restored to our true home and that our Messiah King and his kingdom are coming.

This is why the New Testament apostles often compare the Christian life to the time of exile in the Old Testament. We are sojourners in this world, and our true citizenship is in heaven. The Apostle Peter pleads with us, *"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul"* (1 Pet 2:11). In the same vein, Paul reminds Christians, *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Phil 3:20).

In this foreign land, we need one another and we need the church. We need to have our hearts shaped by a better King and find nourishment from a better table. And that is exactly what the church offers to us week after week when we gather in worship to hear God's Word and partake in the Lord's Supper.

Until the day Christ returns, the people of God will face various Nebuchadnezzars who rise and fall, acquiring power through force and striving to shape our allegiances. However, we must be determined to fix our eyes on Jesus—who is the true and better king.

He is the king who wins a people for himself not through conquest but through the cross. Even though we were once by nature children of wrath, he has loved us and welcomed us into his family. He invites us to His table, and we are nourished and transformed by his grace. And one day, his perfect kingdom will come in fullness, and we will know what it means to be truly home.

But until that day comes, may we offer a watching world a vision of life that is only possible because of Jesus. May we seek to be a faithful church that builds a colony of heaven in a land of death. Like Daniel, may we live faithfully in a foreign world, knowing that in Christ we have found the promise of our truest home. AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

1. Read Daniel Chapter 1 out loud and summarize the story in your own words.
2. Notice how Daniel and his friends made a bold choice to resist compromise in their diet. What are some practical ways you can resist compromising your faith in the midst of a culture that often contradicts your beliefs?
3. Are there daily habits you can adopt or change to help you remain faithful and focused on Christ?
4. The idea of being “faithful in a foreign world” is a challenge many Christians face today. How can we, as a community, better support one another in navigating the pressures and temptations of the world around us while remaining steadfast in our faith? What practical steps can we take together to strengthen our commitment to God?