

## **DANIEL - KEEPING YOUR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY IN A DARK WORLD**

**Studies in Daniel 1, 3, and 6 - Part one**

**Sunday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026 - 10 a.m.**

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**Daniel 1:1-8 - “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. [2] 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. [3] 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, [4] 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. [5] 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. [6] Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. [7] 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. [8] 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.”**

Most of us know the story of Daniel, or at least elements of it, from our earliest days. I can still remember singing that great hymn of faith of the church in what we used to call Sunday School:

“Dare to be a Daniel,  
Dare to stand alone.  
Dare to have a purpose firm  
And dare to make it known.”

Daniel has an almost unblemished record of service to the Lord - in some ways, even cleaner and stronger than David's. In this series of messages, we're going to try to answer the question: ***What made Daniel like that?***  
***What goes into the shaping of a person's character before God?***  
Remember those questions as we look into the background of today's text:

- 1) **GREATNESS OF CHARACTER IS FREQUENTLY SHAPED IN CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LOOK ANYTHING BUT PROMISING**

**IPAD TEXT - Daniel 1:1-4 - “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. [2] 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. [3] 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, [4] 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.**

Daniel lived at a very crucial time in Judah’s history. He lived during **King Jehoiakim’s** reign. And he lived at a time of prophetic fulfillment in Judah’s national life. It’s quite likely that Daniel stood as a young man and actually listened to the “weeping prophet” - **Jeremiah** - warn of God’s coming judgement on Judah for her wickedness and forgetfulness of God.

In fact, if Daniel was as sharp and keen as the text indicates he was, he may have even **known** that his very circumstances were a part of the **fulfillment of God's prophecy regarding the judgement of Judah**. He may have had a chance to hear quoted in the temple, or somehow read, these words of the prophet Isaiah written years before the events took place:

**IPAD TEXT - Isaiah 39:6-7 - "Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. [7] And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."**

That's exactly what happened to Daniel. When **Nebuchadnezzar** came and besieged Jerusalem in 605 B.C., he took about 75 young men back to Babylon. Daniel was in that crowd. So were three other men who would become famous. We know them by the new names they received in Babylon - **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego**.

Now, here's the point to this bit of background. Whatever lofty views you have about the personal strength and integrity and might of Daniel, you must remember that his life wasn't formed in a vacuum.

***Greatness doesn't happen as you sit and dream about greatness. It must be formed in real life history. And frequently it has to be formed in difficult circumstances.***

And it ***can*** be formed in difficult circumstances. These young disciples had nothing going for them. Everything argued for their failure. Everything visible argued against their future. This is where the life of Daniel has relevance for all of us. I frequently hear sentences like this:

***"Pastor Don, you have no idea how hard it is to serve Jesus when you're the only Christian on the job site." "You have no idea what it is like to have to go home to a godless house where I'm the only one who is even remotely interested in honoring the Lord."***

Listen, there's a priceless model, preserved for our use today by the Spirit of God, in the life of Daniel. There's a pattern for every person who feels the heat of trying to stay loyal to one kingdom while being forced to live in another.

This applies to young and old alike. ***Daniel is fifteen when Babylon gets its hooks into his life!*** And ***seventy years later*** he's still searching the Scriptures to determine exactly when God will send His promised restoration and deliverance for His people! And he's still ***unbribed***. He can't be bought or manipulated. He's still ***untarnished by sin or compromise***. We'll look at how he did that in a few minutes.

2) **GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES SEEM TO ARGUE OTHERWISE**

**IPAD TEXT - Daniel 1:1-2 - "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. [2] 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."**

It's hard for us to imagine how disheartening this whole alien conquest would have been for the faithful in Judah. Not only had one king come and taken power over the other, one god had claimed the objects of worship from the other as well. The sacred objects from the temple of the living God, the God who had made covenant with Abraham, were taken into the temple of worship in Babylon. Nothing would spell failure like that did. Not only had their city been taken captive - so, it seemed, had their God.

Whenever events look bleak and hopeless it's always important to remember that ***two stories are being told at the same time in any set of circumstances***. You can see this so clearly in this passage:

**IPAD TEXTS - Verse 1 - "...Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it."**

**Verse 2 - "...the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand..."**

There's the story ***in front*** of the curtain. And there's the story ***behind*** the curtain. There's the event itself. And there's the ***meaning***, the ***plan*** behind the event. There's what I see and feel ***right now***. And there's what God has ***yet to unfold*** in this situation.

Perhaps because this was such a source of strength for Daniel during his time of trial, he includes this reminder as he writes this letter in the third person. ***“God is still in control - even in this capture of Jerusalem. Don’t ever forget, with God, no situation ever gets out of control. All of life is lived in His hands.”***

This truth is of more than just intellectual interest. ***Who you see in control of your life has everything to do with how you respond to the circumstances of life.*** Look at the situation in Daniel’s day. Many people just caved in to the pressure and power of Babylon. Others probably gave up on God. After all, the temple and it’ articles were so obviously overpowered by the god of Babylon.

Daniel sets himself to ***humble himself and pray for God’s forgiveness and grace.*** Why? Because Daniel knows that Nebuchadnezzar didn’t just waltz in and take God’s city and temple on his own strength. Nobody can ***out muscle*** God. So obviously God must be working to judge, humble and reawaken His people. That’s why Daniel seeks God while the people scatter.

Daniel brings *understanding* to the situation. Consider the situation in Judah. **Jehoiakim** had been a wicked king. The people had come to think they were invincible because they were “God’s people.” They had long ago forsaken the true worship of God. All they had were the buildings and the gold and the vessels. They had come to treat their faith like a lucky rabbit’s foot. They called on God when they needed something yet ignored His commandments and warnings.

Does any of that sound familiar to you? Now God was going to show them that there was no protection in Jehoiakim. And there was no strength in the rituals. ***That’s why both the military might and the spiritual center of their lives were exposed by God as being phoney and empty.*** God exposes the very things they’ve relied on as futile and empty. God was at work to wake up His people. Daniel was wise enough to trace God’s hand in all the seasons of life.

3) **NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S PLAN WAS TO OBLITERATE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD FROM THESE YOUNG MEN’S LIVES**

**IPAD TEXT - Daniel 1:3-5 - “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, [4] 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. [5] 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.”**

These young men weren’t *punished*. They were *brainwashed*. They weren’t *tortured*. They were *seduced*. Don’t just pray for the *persecuted* church. Pray for the *affluent* church. The value of studying Daniel’s story is it runs incredibly parallel to our own North American situation.

Here is a precise picture of how the spirit of the age works through our present culture to draw people from Christ. Nebuchadnezzar was a cagey king. He wanted a *thorough* victory over his enemies. He wanted to do more than just hold them under his heel with constant military might. *He wanted to change their hearts and minds.*

It was only after this first victory that he wanted to **use** these men in his service. He knew he would have much more success if he could, in the future, install loyal **Jewish** leaders over captured areas to do his bidding. So he had long term plans for these young men.

Nebuchadnezzar's plan unfolds itself in clear cut stages. We're going to look at **five** of them. We'll study three of them tonight and two more next Sunday night.

- a) **First, he isolated them from their people and their worship.** That's why he didn't just besiege Jerusalem and destroy the inhabitants. He **uprooted the best people he could find and brought them to Babylon.**

I know every pastor has a few subjects about which he feels so strongly he risks **nagging** the flock into remembering. I just want you to know that **I know** I nag about this point. I pray **and** I nag because I know how repeatedly and how consistently the world and the flesh and the devil all conspire in the simple, age old effort to **separate people from the sources of their spiritual nourishment and faith.** It's the one area of spiritual compromise where Christians seem to yield to the enemy without even resisting.

Always remember that life is **orchestrated** - and I use that word very intentionally - **orchestrated** to separate you from the sources of spiritual nourishment. Everything in this world is geared to **separate you from your time in Bible study**. Everything in this world is geared to **separate you from basic, regular interaction with the Church, the Body of Christ**.

You can't stay close to Jesus and be distant from the church. Everything in this world is geared to **separate you from the basic discipline of time on your knees with Jesus in prayer**.

Notice from our text that this is the enemy's **first line of attack**. This is what clears any inward residue of power for resistance to further deterioration down the road. **Look for inroads of future spiritual compromise here first**.

- b) **Second, Nebuchadnezzar labored to indoctrinate them in the ways and customs of the Chaldeans - Daniel 1:4b - "... 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." - IPAD TEXT**

Remember, these young men are still in their early teens. They aren't **doing** anything in Babylon yet. But they were **absorbing** Babylon. That was the whole plan. One day they will be assigned responsibilities under Nebuchadnezzar. They will be called upon to **act out** their allegiance to Babylon.

But Nebuchadnezzar is a wise king. He knows all about the heritage and customs these young Jewish men hold to. He knows that, because they were the cream of the crop, they hold to a history of being **called by God through Abraham**. These young men know all about **God's delivering power as He led them out of Egypt into their promised land**. They know that **God speaks and God acts on behalf of those who keep His ways and put their trust in Him**.

Nebuchadnezzar knows that long before he can make them **act** like Babylonians he must make them **think** like Babylonians. He knows he must make them learn **Chaldean language, Chaldean customs**, Chaldean ways of thinking and living. These young men aren't **doing anything wrong**. Long before any actual decisions and actions are called for, they are **pressed to unlearn the ways of their heritage and their God**.

Listen to these brilliant words from **David Wells** in his book, **“God In The Wasteland”** - ***“We live in a world with a system of values and a set of assumptions that kills the love for God required by the first and greatest commandment...Every culture makes some sins easier to indulge in and others more difficult, throws a cloak of legitimacy over some, but not others. It is especially important for the church, in its own cultural location, to be able to discern generically how sin is made to look normal and normative and how righteousness is made to look strange.”***

Note - ***“....how sin is made to look normal and normative and how righteousness is made to look strange.”*** Behold the wisdom of the enemy. Paul warned about the same tactic in **Romans 12:2** - ***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*** - IPAD TEXT

Don't miss Paul's simple point. Long before the battle is lost in some **wicked action**, it was lost in **lazy thinking**. **You don't first betray God in your actions. You first betray Him in your thoughts**. The primary **initial** point of pressure from the world and the devil isn't to **make you do bad things**. The primary battle is to **make you forget true things**.

That's why Jesus said that the main trait of discipleship isn't just the **learning** of truth. The main trait of discipleship is **abiding** in the truth. After **isolating** you from the sources of truth, the next tactic of the enemy is to cause you to **forget the truth you already know**. The only thing harder than **finding** the truth is **keeping** the truth.