



Thriving in Babylon / Book of Daniel
Wk. 1 "Thriving in Babylon"
By Pastor Jody May

Daniel 1:1-21 ESV

Daniel Taken to Babylon

1 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.

Daniel's Faithfulness

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. **9** And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, **10** 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." **11** Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, **12** "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. **13** 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." **14** So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. **15** 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. **16** So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

17 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. **18** 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. **19** 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. **20** 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. **21** And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.



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Thriving in Babylon, Why?

We are starting the book of Daniel today, for in the book of Daniel I believe that we will find a tremendous amount of encouragement. Through the study of this book, we will gain a biblical perspective, a Gospel-centered perspective; that means the good news that we all just learned from the book of Luke in which **we have a resurrected, ascended, and ruling King, and that He helps us live in a land that seems Godless.** Let me recap where we may be nationally with some questions this morning.

Look no one is saying it but were all thinking it, what in the world is going on in our country?

- When did it become the rule of thumb that politicians get away with breaking the law, when other citizens are persecuted to the full extent of it?
- What does it mean when big business, big tech, and big social media can stifle and shut down free speech based on what they deem as hate speech?
- Since when does journalism ignore important news to highlight events that promote their agendas?
- Why are we arresting and fining pastors and churches for peaceably congregating as they see fit?
- Who made the decision to let 5% of our population control the other 95% of the population crying and pouting like spoiled children when they don't get their way resulting in riots and a refusal to work?
- When did we become a land where we are more worried about being politically correct over being biologically correct?
- Since when did it become a good idea to let under-age children determine their sexual preferences when they are neither old enough to vote, drive, or live by themselves?
- What gives learning institutions the right to push Critical Race Theory and define anyone or anything that does not agree with them as Racist and then encourages children to hide these facts from their parents?
- Since when did it become a bad idea to show proof of residency when you want to vote?
- How do you give Trillions of dollars away in cash without ever working on a budget?



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- Whose idea was it to manipulate the military (and CIA), making it the center for LGBTQ rights, instead of protecting the land, which btw they also thought it was a good idea to now legally draft my daughters if need be?
- When did the church become more interested in Social Justice issues of all outside the church instead of adhering to what the scripture says the church should do?

These questions are only the tip of the iceberg of a land that seems very Godless and the realization of that can give those that are trying to live differently, FEAR.

“for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” – 2 Timothy 1:7 ESV



What We're Looking At

What we will discover by going through Daniel is that even though a land and a people seem without a biblical moral compass we do not have to be afraid, we do not have to live in fear, we can confess those feelings to an involved God in our lives, we can repent and choose to live courageously, and by our actions as a representative of God you can have a positive influence in your world much like Daniel did.

You are not that much different than Daniel btw. Daniel wasn't even 20 yet when faced with the life altering decision to trust God with his life as we see here in chapter 1. Daniel grew in faith like we all do, Daniel was part of the elect like we are, Daniel saw the world under God's reign as we should, and Daniel spent a life believing that, as we will.

The book of Daniel is more than just the stories of him in the Lions' den or the boys surviving the fiery furnace. **It is about God's people living in and thriving, having dominion in a land that is totally corrupt.** Babylon is such a bad place, that the Apostle John in the book of Revelation uses Babylon as a reference/metaphor to mean all the wickedness of the world in Rev. 17:5-6 ESV – *And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations"* ⁶*And I saw the woman, drunk with the*



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blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Then in chapter 18 Babylon is condemned for specifically leading people away from the truth.

Babylon is not a good place it is a city of vast evil, worshipping demonic deities as demi-gods, it has been a jewel in the eyes of world leaders to be fought for since its' conception, so it is stained with blood. And in 70 years, the expanse of the book of Daniel, she will be up for grabs again as the Persians, under king Cyrus, take their chance to steal her and make her their jewel of the empire.

Now let's go back to our text this morning and read this account in Chapter 1 and keep in mind how Daniel reacts to being taken to this most ungodly place.

Reading of the Text:

[Read all of Chapter 1 at this point]

Historical Setting and Background:

It's 605 BC and Nebuchadnezzar has just defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. On his way back home, he stops by Jerusalem because he has a disagreement to settle with king Jehoiakim in Jerusalem. Jehoiakim is the son of Josiah, the last good king of Jerusalem that was guided by the prophet Jeremiah. Under Jeremiah's preaching, by the prophesying of Hulda the prophetess 2 Kings 22:14–20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22–28 and the reestablishment of the book of the law, Josiah has come to learn and believe the writing on the wall, they will become a vassal to Babylon. The city of God WILL serve the city of Satan but even in that there is hope for God always preserves a remnant.

We aren't sure why, perhaps to show themselves loyal to Babylon, or to make a good impression, but when Pharaoh Neco II sent troops to help Assyrian refugees retake Haran, Josiah rode out to meet him in battle in 608 BC. He was killed in the attempt and Neco placed in power Josiah's son Jehoahaz for he was sympathetic to Egypt. That reign was cut short and only lasted 3 months till Nebuchadnezzar swung by while fighting with Egypt and put Jehoiakim in power because of his sympathies to Babylon. Jehoiakim didn't do well with being loyal to Neb. and so



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in 605 he takes Jehoiakim, Daniel, his three friends and Jerusalem's best and brightest to Babylon for reeducation. Much how we hear now that the Chinese and N. Koreans place people in camps for reconditioning, this was the intent of Neb. to influence and send them back to Jerusalem to work for him there.

The Dilemma

So, instead of just leaving them alone, letting Jerusalem limp on in its' subjection now to Babylon, it's not good enough. **The devil doesn't just want to subjugate God's people, he wants to fundamentally change people.** He wants to replace the things of God with the desires of the flesh and what he can offer you.

³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴youths 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.

He wanted to teach the smartest ones the literature (religion) and language (culture) of the Chaldeans that is astrology and the occult. He wanted to not erase their knowledge but show them that their teachings had been skewed, for you **remember these young men, had grown up in Jeremiah's church.** He wanted to tear down all their old stories and erase them their history from their minds and rebuild their loyalties to him. Jeremiah was their preacher and Josiah their king, they had been taught the law, they had been taught how the faithful live, they had been led to believe that there is only one God, and His name was YHWH. Neb. wanted to prove that YHWH did not and could not save them.

⁵The 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. ⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷And 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.



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The food distribution is to show who is the true provider for these men, **you should honor the state the government for what it does for you**, it was to make them change loyalties. Not only that but they have their names changed:

Daniel – God has judged - Belteshazzar servant of Bel (Satan)

Hananiah – Yaweh is gracious – Shadrach

Mishael – Who is what God is? – Meshach

Azariah – Yahweh has helped – Abednego

All their names were changed to represent the mini gods in Babylon Bel, Aku, and Nabu. (much to the dismay of the *Last Air Bender* fans)

I also need to at least mention one other point here. **Usually in this scenario men in the palace faced castration.** Now we cannot prove that here because it does not say specifically in the text but they either they were or they were threatened by this possibility, either way it is a reality they had to live with.

It seems that Daniel is faced with **what every believer is faced with**, do you really **want to believe in a God that has allowed this to happen to you, or do you want to embrace what the god of this world can give you?** Wouldn't it be easier to live without morality, without a conscience to do what seems right to you, and if you do you will receive everything you need right here at the king's table.

The Other Side of the Coin

BUT Daniel knew something before any of this ever happened. By the teachings of Jeremiah and even the prophecies of Isaiah ([Isaiah 44:28](#)), Daniel knows, this is all part of the plan. As he records in his retelling of this event.

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.

The one responsible and in charge of this whole event is not Neb. **it is God Himself.** God not only has allowed Babylon to work for Him, taking the best to preserve them for Him, to get them away from their corruptible government and priests, but **God has chosen this point in history to show the world He is**



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sovereign, and He is in the middle of all things! It looks like the Babylonians have all the cards stacked in their favor but God on purpose has picked a fight.

He had His things moved to the enemy camp so He can start taking over! **You see when we see doom and gloom God sees opportunity, He sees time to make the wise foolish!** It is going to become a house game, *Harry Potter* fans, it is the battle for the *House Cup*. Which house will be the ultimate victor?

This even also points to one of the glorious doctrines of the gospel.¹

“Because of the sins of the people, God allows Himself to be taken captive and abused, He allows His faithful servants the privilege of going into captivity and being abused along with Him. Over the course of time, God and His servants defeat the gods and servants of the wicked, convert or destroy them, and emerge victorious.... The fact that He now enlists His people as agents to work within the world (not merely show up and condemn it, as Moses did), indicates that His people are becoming mature enough to work alongside Him in this endeavor.” – James B. Jordan

That’s right, Jesus isn’t the only person that God is offering up to the world to tell His story; He uses His people, He invites them into the fray, to stand WITH Him, to have something worth living for, to bear a cause that is bigger than themselves, God offers a chance to be on the winning side, the side of right and might!

This is where Daniel responds to this dilemma in front of him, and I want you to see that armed with the truth of the Gospel, that God picks fights and finishes them, and invites us to join in, that Daniel responds the best way one can.

1. Optimism – He chooses to believe what he already knows.

What we are stating is that Daniel is moving on what he already believes; look at what Daniel has figured out:

¹ James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2007), 134-135.



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⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank... ¹² **"Test** your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ 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."

He's like ok I am in this predicament, if God is for me, then who can be against me? Let's put this to the test, I will rely on what I already know to be true and choose to believe that in the end God will triumph. **God can provide for me better than your gods, even in enemy territory, and the evidence will be plain.**

I think this is where a lot of us get into trouble, we think Christianity always comes with a get out of trouble card, or that when we pray lead me not into temptation that it means we will never find ourselves in some type of moral pressure cooker because God wouldn't do that to us.

But what is happening for Daniel, as it happens for reach of us, as God invites us into the struggle, to preserve us, to sanctify us, is that God wants to remind us that **even when we are in Babylon He's still in Control**, as a matter of fact that's where He wants us to go there for He is there already waiting on us!

Romans 13:1-2 ESV

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that **which God has established**. The authorities that exist have been established by God.² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Let's say it this way, **"God is in control of who is in control."** Because of this fact here is the point of contact with that truth, where the rubber meets the road, where you need to believe what the Bible says:

1 Peter 4:17 ESV

¹⁷ For it is **time for judgment to begin at the household** of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?



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God's people, the church, get judged first, you and I are put into positions to see what we will do, that is the game plan of God. **You're were made to be displayed!** *No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bed* ([Luke 8:16](#)).

Jesus didn't come to earth in Luke, if you remember, to blow up authority structures and He didn't lose hope and despair when He saw what was going to happen to Him, He surrendered His will to God, knew it was His time to be judged in front of others, He ate from His Father's table ([Psalm 75:8](#)), and demolished Satan's game plan from Daniel's day, **because it shows the temptations of the world do not compare with God's glory**, and if Jesus has shown that nothing compares to God, then we need to be **optimistic**, grow a spiritual spine, step up to the plate, and swing away, for God wants to use our displays of loyalty to Him, so we may share in the joy of seeing Him high and lifted up. (**Possible illustration of Optimism**)

If we learn anything in this text, it is that yes, **many times the world has short-term success**. You can go bankrupt, you can fail in a marriage, you can fail a class, you can do some damage to a child's psyche as a parent, you can lose your job, you can disappoint people and the list goes on, **but the good news of the Gospel is that God always wins and will take the world's short term victory, as He did with the cross, and win it all long term, as HE did with the empty tomb, because God is always in charge of those in charge and that never changes!...**

2. **Humility** – He treats people with respect even when they are the enemy.

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**. ⁹ And **God gave Daniel favor and compassion** in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,



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This is so Hard, I know! Daniel didn't make a demand, he didn't want to sneak the food in, he wanted to show he was willing to play it by their rules. **There is nothing harder than being humble to people and not demanding your rights.** Daniel didn't organize a march, he didn't riot and lute, he didn't lie and do what he wanted anyway, he simply asked showing he was obedient to his captors. In exchange God rewarded Daniel with an attentive and pliant ear of his captors.

This is so hard, I know, but it is one of the ways that God lets us shine for Him. In the time of the NT listen to the advice Paul gives to Timothy on the topic of humility towards the world.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 ESV

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

The reason we don't start demanding retribution/reparations is for the hope that we might win some to Christ! Family would you believe there are still people that need to be saved at your job, in your school, among your friends, and that requires you to act with all humility towards them to win them over. **Your Humility is what wins over hostility every time.**

Principle – We were called to infiltrate not isolate.

Jesus was a master at this. Even though He had beef with a lot of people, He never struck one, for His job was to infiltrate not isolate, and its' your job too. God used Jesus' submission to the authorities of this world to save a remnant, that were your spiritual ancestors, and he is going to use your submission to preserve another generation. And if that is not motivating enough for you to hold your tongue, to curb your angst, then let me ask you **why are you a Christian?** Why are you a Christian if it is not to get a chance to model your Lord, do the



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work like He did, and hopefully bring some lost family members back into the fold?

Christians can't rise to the highest places in society, as Daniel did, if we lack respect for those in authority over us. And the job of evangelism is easier when you're in positions to affect people's life in your society. Lastly, there is also something to be gained if we are Optimistic and Humble:

3. Wisdom – He is educated by the enemy to influence ALL for God.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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.

First thing I want you to notice is that Daniel and the boys didn't reject learning the religion and culture of their day. They didn't agree with it, but they jumped at the chance to learn about it. **How else can we learn to confront the enemy unless you take the time and learn their arguments**, learn what they believe, and then learn what the better alternative is. You already have the best tool available to you for this endeavor!

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. – **2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV**

Then when we work at it there is an exponential rate of return on it, **you don't just get out what you put in it, you get out of it what God puts in it**. For Daniel he got to keep his name, rep for God, and was ten times better than anyone else at his job. What could you do in your life if your influence multiplied by 10? The



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principle is true, as Jesus taught the parable of the talents, investing your gifts and abilities for God's purposes multiplies what you have ([Luke 19:11-27](#)).

Closing Arguments

Jesus is the better Solomon, He's the better Daniel, and through His Wisdom, tempered with Humility and bolstered by Optimism He out argued the Devil, but it was all done by knowing God's Word, God's will, God's truth for this life. Perhaps now more than ever before, God has made this easier for us. Since no argument has been able to disprove God, Jesus, or the empty tomb, perhaps like Jesus, all you need to rely on now are the answers that the Bible gives for the skeptics and then live out what it is telling you to do.

Today friends I am not asking you to be like Daniel, **no I am asking you to emulate our master and perfecter of this race, King Jesus**, because when we live life in His name, and we fail to be Optimistic He will overcome that and lift you up again for **His Optimism comes from a future reality of victory that He's already living in**. When you fail at being humble to those in authority, repent, because His humility already bought you back from the world and they can't take you from Him. And when you fail at being Wise learn from that mistake and gain Wisdom and know in Jesus' Wisdom, **He decided to let you fail** so you could learn that lesson so that he wouldn't just save you but save those watching you.

Rejoice today family, you can *Thrive in Babylon*, you can be in the world and not of it, you can still pray for your city and not be subdued by it, and it still can change, for nothing is impossible for our King who rules it all.



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PRAYER

COMMUNION

BENEDICTION

Go in the name of the Father, that allows Babylon to exist so that it brings Him glory.

Go in the name of the Son, who conquered Babylon so that we may learn how to thrive in it.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that changes our hearts to reflect Christ so we too can be Optimistic, Humble, and Wise in a world that God has not given up on yet.