

DANIEL 1

WEEK 2



Historical Context & Background

The Middle East has a long history of wars and conflict with major nations. The 6th Century BC was no exception. This period of time saw huge battles between the nations of Egypt and the Babylonians. Caught in the middle geographically and politically was Judea under Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim sided with Egypt. So, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylon, defeated Egypt in several battles he also besieged and entered Jerusalem where he gave the ultimate insult of robbing the temple in Jerusalem and removing priceless holy articles and transferring them to the temple of his god, Bel Marduk.

The Babylonians had a brilliant strategy where they took the “best of the best” young men from the cities they conquered, training them into men who would be civil servants for the king’s court. So Daniel, who would have become a great leader in Jerusalem, instead finds himself with a full scholarship at a foreign “university,” stuck with a new name (Belteshazzar), learning a new language, new customs, new diet, etc. Daniel’s life is a testimony that you can be successful in a difficult place and be pure spiritually at the same time.



Related Passages

2 Kings 24:1-7, 2 Chronicles 36:5-8 – Babylon enslaves Judah

2 Kings 20:16-18, 2 Kings 24:10-17 – Isaiah prophesies that Babylon will overcome Israel, and then the Jewish people are conquered and carried into exile.

Genesis 39:21 – God is with Joseph while he’s a prisoner.

Genesis 41:46 – God brings Joseph out of bondage and into a position of influence.



Key Terms

Babylon: The super power nation of that day. Conquered the Jews.

Articles from the temple of God: Beautifully crafted of gold and precious metal, these bowls and vessels would have been used in the worship and service in the temple in Jerusalem. They were carried away as plunder when the Babylonians overtook Jerusalem.

Defile: To make something unclean or polluted by treating it with disrespect (to use something in the way it was not intended). In this case, to touch what the Lord deemed unclean, and what he knew was wrong to partake of.



Key Themes

Living As Exiles: The essential framework of Daniel's story is that he is living as an exile. He lives under the dominion of Babylon after they have just conquered his nation and ransacked his Temple. Interestingly this is a theme that persists throughout Scripture. Paul recognizes that we live as "aliens" in this world (Eph. 2:19). The author of Hebrews says that all those who are faithful to the way of God are "strangers and exiles" in the cultures we inhabit (Heb. 11:13). Peter sees the same thing (1 Pet. 2:11-12). So we are exiles. Not just to this world in general, but to this campus specifically. Daniel's life enormous insight into how we live our everyday lives as exiles. In his story we see several keys to living faithfully as one who is in exile—one committed to honoring God in a world that is insistent on honoring status, power, and wealth.

Community: When we are tested, God provides a way of faithfulness (1 Corinthians 10:13). Often then looks like providing us with some companions to help us. In a foreign place, under customs that aren't just *different* but are actually *antithetical* to his faith, Daniel manages to remain faithful to God. And a huge factor in that faithfulness was that he didn't do it alone. He surrounded himself with friends also living as exiles (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who famously will go into a fiery furnace for their devotion to God). It is within this community that Daniel discerned where the line was between living as part of a new culture and not being defiled by that culture. Undoubtedly these friends encouraged one another to remain faithful when the temptation was to do what was easy instead. And this is the role of Christian communities always: discerning how to walk in faithfulness, and encouraging one another when the journey becomes difficult.

Excellence: Daniel and his friends are brought to Babylon to learn "language and literature," and in the end "God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning" to them. Through his knowledge and excellence in these areas, Daniel became *extremely* influential, and because of it he was responsible for helping pagan kings recognize God (2:47; 4:37; 6:26-27). The takeaway: *Part of being an exile is being excellent in your station.* Paul says "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col 3:23). God honors faithfulness to the task at hand, in this case both spiritual and academic concerns. As students, you should be excellent like Daniel, gaining knowledge and learning. That is how you witness to campus (among other ways).

Rebellion: Something Daniel does beautifully is discern when to be rebellious and when to work with those who rule over him. Often times as we consider how to interact with the surrounding culture, we tend to fall into two extremes: 1) we take on their whole way of living and thinking without question; or 2) we reject everything about a culture and adopt an "us" vs. "them" mentality that mitigates our ability to be God's hands and feet in that world. We learn *two rules for living in exile*: 1. Always obey and live under authority when that authority doesn't conflict with God (Romans 13). 2. Even if you rebel (as Daniel did), accept the consequences for your disobedience (as Daniel did), even if they're unjust (like being fed to lions). Christian disobedience is civil disobedience. Jesus did it, the Christian martyrs did it, Martin Luther King Jr. did it. You must, too.

Faithfulness with Little: Daniel and his friends decide not to “defile” themselves. It’s weird that they think something simple like food would defile them, but there’s a couple of really important things to note about this. First, there was a very literal reason they couldn’t eat: Jews had really specific dietary restrictions. To eat unclean meat was to disobey God and defile oneself. This is important because it shows us that faithfulness to God trumps faithfulness to any king, even if it’s in something small like what you eat.

But there’s a second element to this as well. Daniel knows that faithfulness in the little things is essential to faithfulness in the big things. Christ tells us as much: “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much” (Luke 16:10). Daniel and his friends make the little decisions—not to eat certain things, to pray regularly (Dan. 6:10). The faithfulness in these little decisions leads to faithfulness in the big ones. God doesn’t deliver these four young men from their “Final Exam” before the King (vv. 18-20), but they’re faithful through it. Later, God doesn’t deliver them from being thrown into a furnace or the lions’ den, but they’re faithful to face it. They’ve been practicing.

The point is this: we can’t wait until faced with the lions’ den or the furnace to make tough decisions. We won’t do it. We have to be faithful in the little things. Can you honestly expect to say no to sex with your girlfriend, when you’ve never said no to your computer? How can we be faithful in the small things? This is the question we all, need to answer.

📖 Quotes & Illustrations

“There is always some peace in having submitted to what is right. Don’t spoil it by worrying about the results, if you can help it. It is not your business to succeed (no one can be sure of that) but do what is right: when you have done so, the rest lies with God...”

C. S. LEWIS

In 1982, the Oscar for Movie of the Year went to *Chariots of Fire*, the story of an athlete who was a Christian and died as a missionary in China. He was on the 1924 British Olympic team but refused to participate in a preliminary race at the Olympics because it was on Sunday. Eric Liddell went on to win the Gold Metal for the 400 meter dash later in the same Olympics. Later Liddell went to prison for being a missionary. Interesting that in the Japanese Prison camp where he and other civilians in China were confined, he led athletic game for children on Sunday (after worship services) because that was the only day the Japanese allowed it.

! Three Main Points

1. Faithfulness in the small decisions leads to faithfulness in the big decisions. Find what small decisions your students need to be faithful to.
2. Daniel commitments to make the most of the situation in which he and his friends find themselves and allows the Lord to bless their studies. We must strive to be excellent in

school, studying as if unto the Lord.

3. Living in a faithful community is essential to discerning where the line is between living as part of a culture and not being defiled by that culture. Surround yourselves with faithful friends.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think God inspired this story to be included in Scripture?
- What do we learn about God in this passage? What do we learn about people in this passage?
- If God doesn't always deliver us from exile, trials, the furnace, the lions' den, then what does he deliver us from? Is that enough? Why do we go through those things?
- Do you feel perfectly at home in the contexts in which you live—your classes, your family, your dorm or sorority or with your old high school friends? Or do you feel like an exile? If you find that you don't feel like an exile, why do you think that is? Should you feel different?
- How do you think Daniel was able to remain faithful—living out God's way in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's world? What factors made his faithfulness possible?
- How does this story relate to this campus?
- How does this passage intersect with your life?
- Daniel lived as faithful member of a foreign nation. What is our role as Christians who are citizens in the United States?
- What are the parallels between the young Hebrew men at "Babylonia University" and your situation at UK? The differences?
- What are all the things that Daniel and his friends had to allow to be changed? (For example their names, their language, their clothing, their studies.) Why did they draw the line at their food? Where do we allow ourselves to be assimilated into the culture?
- How did they get Ashpenaz on board to change their food? How is this an example of how we should negotiate our differences with a hostile culture?
- How do you feel about God helping them learn all kinds (not just Jewish) of literature and learning? Does that mean your mom was wrong for not letting you read *Harry Potter*?
- Daniel served in the King's court for over half a century. What is the value of longevity?
- Where do you see your faith convictions being tested or compromised by those in authority over you? Are you responding with conviction or compromise?

Application and Practice

Fasting: This week spend 3 days fasting from meat and soda (or alcohol if they drink). Any time you crave meat or drink, pray

Learning: This week do ALL of your homework and study diligently. During class time, participate in a way that demonstrates excellence. Now don't be the annoying student who talks just so people hear him talk, but respond *thoughtfully* when questions are asked. If you want bonus

points here, go to a professor's office hours and discuss something you found interesting about what you're learning.

Royal Food & Wine: Daniel abstained from the King's lavish (and probably delicious) meals because he saw how it would compromise his faithfulness. What are the "royal food and wine" of campus—things that are lifted up as good but might compromise your devotion to God? (Netflix? "Parties"? Dressing or acting "cool"? Obsessing over UK sports? Yoga pants?) Commit to abstain from it for a time (or permanently if it's bad).

Literature: Read a great book of literature. It can be a short story or a novel or a play. Make sure it's literary (aka not *Twilight*). If you need recommendations, ask a staff member. (Staff members, if you don't read enough to be able to answer this question, 1. read more; 2. point them to someone who can give a good answer.)



Going Deeper

"Life in Exile: Compromise" - A sermon from John Mark Comer of Bridgetown Church

"Live on Earth as Citizens of Heaven" - An article from Desiring God

The Bible Project on Daniel - A whole host of resources, including a great overview video.