

**CULTURE SHOCK**  
**State of Shock**  
**Daniel 1:1-7**

For the next 12 weeks, I want us to study one of the greatest books in the entire bible: The Book of Daniel. This book is packed with stories and principles and prophecies that will absolutely blow your mind as it instructs and inspires you. I want you to be as excited as I am as we walk through the pages of this amazing book. I also want to encourage you to read one chapter of Daniel each week in preparation for our study on each successive Sunday. This will help you to meditate in advance on the truths that we will unpack together each week. I would also encourage you to read these chapters out loud as a family together if you are so inclined. It will give you great fodder for conversation. But be warned! The second half of this book is filled with remarkable prophetic images and visions that will challenge and stretch you. My desire is to help you see the wisdom and sovereign power of God that is revealed in these pages. Remember; the book of Daniel is the “Revelation” of the Old Testament! It will be great fun to study and learn it together. But the first half of Daniel is filled with familiar stories of the faith of Daniel and his friends in troubled times. Here is how their story begins: **Daniel 1:1-2 NLT**

1 During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god.

The story of Daniel begins with a shocking introduction. God sent a pagan king named Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem – the City of God – in order to completely CONQUER it. God gave him absolute success. He broke into the city and demonstrated his power by going into the Temple of God and taking some of the most sacred objects and bringing them into the temple of his pagan god back in Babylon. He did this to make the point that his god was greater than the God of the Jews. This is how victory in war was always viewed. If I won the war, then my god is greater than your god. Nebuchadnezzar saw it this way, and he wanted the Jewish people to adopt and worship his gods and become immersed in his pagan culture of power and pleasure as they served him. Who wouldn't want that? But God had something far different in mind. In fact, this mighty king of Babylon was nothing more than an instrument in the hand of Almighty God. This is a key principle in the book of Daniel:

**Pagan powers are the pawns of the Sovereign God!**

God was not caught off-guard by Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem. He not only ALLOWED it; he ARRANGED it. The word says that God “gave him the victory”

over Judah, and that he “permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the temple!” Nebuchadnezzar did not ASK for God’s permission, or even think that he was acting with permission from God. But the Word makes it clear that he was doing just that. **Do you get CONFUSED when God allows things to happen in your life that seem so CONTRARY to what a loving God should or would allow?** I know that I do at times! I will never forget how encouraged I was by the words of a pastor who said, “Don’t fear! The church was born in the midst of the pagan Roman Empire. We are going to be FINE!” Habakkuk was an immediate predecessor of Daniel who wrote about God’s sovereign plan to deal with the wickedness around him. When Habakkuk asked God how he was going to deal with the rebellion and sin of his own people, he answered in this unexpected way:

**Habakkuk 1:5-7, 9 NLT**

5 The LORD replied, "Look around at the nations; look and be amazed! For I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn't believe even if someone told you about it. 6 I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and violent people. They will march across the world and conquer other lands. 7 They are notorious for their cruelty and do whatever they like. ... 9 "On they come, all bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind, sweeping captives ahead of them like sand.

If you look over the course of history, you may wonder why some nations rise in power when they do while others wither and die. God’s Word makes it clear that God raises up powers and authorities for his own sovereign, eternal purposes in this earth. He has a perfect, divine plan. When we study the second half of Daniel, we will see this truth in clear form as we study the prophecies that Daniel was given about what powers would rise and fall in the earth for the next 2,000+ years. **It takes a person with great faith to trust in God when all that is precious and familiar to you is suddenly taken from you!** Daniel demonstrated just that when he wrote the opening words of his book. God was in control of the situation that seemed so out of control. Perhaps God used the faith of the Prophet Habakkuk to help Daniel respond properly to the horror of what happened in his day. I love the words of Habakkuk after he heard God’s terrible, sovereign plan: **Habakkuk 3:16-19 NLT**

16 I trembled inside when I heard this; my lips quivered with fear. My legs gave way beneath me, and I shook in terror. I will wait quietly for the coming day when disaster will strike the people who invade us. 17 Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, 18 yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! 19 The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

These words really hit home! This is a very personal portrait of trust. **The truth is, we have a tendency to read the Old Testament documents with a massive sense of disconnectedness. We do not associate our reality with the reality of people who lived thousands of years ago. But people were people then like we are people now. They just did not have iPhones and flat-screen TV's!** **How does your faith hold up when great troubles and sorrows visit your life in abrupt and undeserved ways?** Can you trust God when you get "caught" in the bigger picture of God's sovereign work around you? Are you troubled by the fact that godlessness is on the rise right now in our country, and God does not seem to be doing anything about it? Why doesn't he ACT? I have struggled with this myself. I have watched our own country fall so far from where she was just 35 years ago when I was a teenager. If you had told me in 1980 that our nation would be legalizing marijuana and churches would be sanctioning same-sex marriage, I would have said that you were crazy! But we have seen just that. I spoke to our teenagers a few months ago about this very topic. I shared that the main things that I was struggling with at church when I was in our youth group in Vilonia, Arkansas were: 1) Is rock music evil? 2) How long should my hair be? 3) Do I have to wear long pants to swim with girls? 4) How far is too far? **Today, teenagers have to grapple with huge moral and spiritual issues that are brought right up in their face through SOCIAL MEDIA and through massive shifts in church and governmental authority.** They have to wrestle with concepts like: 1) Why should I reject other people's ideas of truth and faith if they believe as deeply as me in their god? 2) Does the church have the right to take a stance against same-sex marriage? 3) Is there really such a thing as ABSOLUTE TRUTH? (Can God's Word be trusted?) 4) How can I stand up for my beliefs without being intolerant? Truly, how can our children really find peace and stability in God when such instability abounds? Is it possible? Yes, it is!

The book of Daniel is a powerful reminder of how we can live out our faith in God when it doesn't even seem to make sense to believe that God is still in control! You see, King Nebuchadnezzar brought more than just silver and gold back with him to Babylon. **Daniel 1:3-5 NLT**

**3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. 4 "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon." 5 The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.**

This is the explanation for why Daniel is found in Babylon. It was not his choice or his desire. He was there because his family had been either slaughtered or taken as SLAVES to this pagan nation. Everything that was familiar and precious to Daniel

was suddenly and cruelly taken from him. In an instant, Daniel's life changed. Daniel was a teenager who lived in Jerusalem with his wealthy family. He was a part of the nobility. He was a "blue blood." He also had the advantage of having parents who at least had a measure of faith in God. They gave him the name Daniel, which means "God is my Judge." We will see within the first few verses of this book that his faith was a key part of his personal life when he went through the initial stages of CULTURE SHOCK. **Culture shock happens when you are immersed into an unfamiliar culture that is foreign to you in almost every way. When you experience culture shock, you become confused and disoriented about how you should respond to all that is happening around you.** Culture shock affects us all differently. Some people just shut down completely! [What is the worst case of culture shock that you have ever experienced?](#) For me, it was a series of overseas trips to Israel, Singapore, and Thailand. These places blew my mind and knocked me off of my Southern, Bible-belt groove! Nothing was familiar to me in these lands, and I found that I could not even eat the food that they served me at first. I especially had to really grapple with what I believed as I watched families worship together in Buddhist temples using incense sticks and tiny bronze bells as they bowed before a giant gold statue of the Buddha. They were kind and beautiful and sincere. And I was shaken. Ultimately, this culture shock was very valuable to me. But it did not feel valuable at the time. It was TERRIFYING.

**But culture shock is not just about what happens TO YOU in a foreign culture; it is also about what happens THROUGH YOU in a foreign culture - even if that foreign culture is materializing right in your own back yard!** We must hear one of the most important lessons of the book of Daniel:

**We are called to impact the culture where God providentially places us!**

We cannot just sit quietly and watch the world unfold around us. We are called by God to make a difference where he places us, even if we don't want to be there because that place is uncomfortable and perverse and foreign to everything that we know. [Truly, it would have been easy for Daniel and his three friends to give in to the notion that they could never make a difference in a place like Babylon. How could they have ever known how God would ultimately use them to ROCK this pagan culture within THREE SHORT YEARS?](#) Just think of all of the ways that they changed this vile city by their courageous faith. We studied last fall in AMAZING STORIES about how Daniel's 3 friends refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. They were thrown into the fiery furnace, but God preserved their lives and prompted the king to send out a nationwide DECREE that the LORD was truly THE mighty God! [In fact, these 4 men had a massive influence over 4 different kings and 2 different world powers, all while serving as SLAVES in a FOREIGN LAND!](#) That is remarkable. But they did not know that God was going to do this through them. There is no way that they could have known. All that they were called to do was OBEY GOD and STAY TRUE to their FAITH IN GOD! Then, God would accomplish the rest through them in his own unpredictable way. The same is true for us! [I love hearing stories about the way that some of our own members at CHC are impacting

our culture for God and for good! In this series, I am going to highlight some of these stories as we walk through Daniel together. I know that it will encourage and inspire you!] But there is something that you and I need to see about the reason why God was able to use Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Who are they?) to create culture shock in the Chaldean Nation. This is a principle that we must learn and embrace:

**Our influence is driven by our identity.**

This is a simple fact of life. Your identity determines who you are and what you accomplish. Your identity is what sets you apart. This is easy to see in High School. The JOCKS and the HOT CHICKS all stood out from everyone else. Their IMAGE was their identity, and they worked hard to maintain and develop that image. The NERDS stood out because of their intelligence, their grades, and their funky clothing! As we get older, our identity seems to merge with our roles and occupations: Mom, Doctor, Husband, Soldier, etc. **What is your primary identity?** Is it driven by your image, or your occupation, or your accomplishments? For these four men in the book of Daniel, their primary identity was found in their FAITH. I think that it is really funny that – of all the factors that the King told his Chief of Staff to look for in these Jewish captives (Strong, Young, Good Looking, and Intelligent) – no mention was made of their FAITH. That was not supposed to figure in, but it was the PRIMARY factor in their influence! **Their FAITH was actually what gave DIRECTION to their youth, their strength, their looks, and their intelligence. Thank God they did not let these physical factors become LIMITATIONS on their CAPACITY! [DANGER!]**

The King of Babylon was aware that he needed to help SHAPE the identity of these young men if he was going to be able to use them solely for his purposes. This is why he instructed his Chief Officer to train these young men in the learning and literature of Babylon. He wanted them to understand and embrace the culture and beliefs of their new homeland. These boys were only about 15 years old when they were plunged into this BABYLONIAN COLLEGE, and they graduated in three short years. This could have been devastating to their faith. **It is noteworthy that we do not know the names of any of the other young captives that were chosen with these same criteria in mind by the king. They failed to impact the culture because they did not stay grounded in their faith. They were tragically TYPICAL.** Our four heroes were different because they (like Joseph and Moses) were able to benefit from their pagan education without being corrupted by it. This was a deliberate choice on their part. But their enemy tried really hard to steal their identity from them. (He will do the same to you!) They even changed their names. **Daniel 1:6-7 NLT**

**6 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. 7 The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Beltshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.**

The study of their names is fascinating. **Daniel** (the Lord is my Judge) was changed to **Belteshazzar** (Bel will protect). **Hananiah** (Yahweh has been gracious) was changed to **Shadrach** (Inspired of Aku). **Misrael** (Who is what God is?) was changed to **Meshach** (belonging to Aku). **Azariah** (Yahweh has helped) was changed to **Abednego** (Servant of Nebo). All of their Jewish names were based upon their relationship to the One, True God. All of their Babylonian names were based upon the pagan gods of the Chaldeans (Bel, Aku, and Nebo or Nego). The goal was to get these young men to buy the bait that these gods were much more powerful and beneficial to them than Yahweh had been. **Put yourself in their shoes.** Their homeland had been conquered by this mighty nation, but now they were being given the opportunity to live in a king's palace, eat a king's food, and hold a high position in the king's cabinet. This was a sweet turn of events. They did not have to fear for their lives or follow a "God" who was not powerful enough to protect them from certain destruction. Just 11 years after they were brought to Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar went back to Jerusalem and completely destroyed it! Jerusalem was no more! But now they could follow one who showed signs of real power and longevity. Thank God, they did not buy the lie! This mighty king's power only lasted a few more years, and his grandson lost the entire kingdom to another world power. Power is so FICKLE in the hands of men.

**So, what are we to do with the initial lessons that we learn in Daniel? First, I believe that we must settle in our minds that God is sovereign over our circumstances.** Choose to trust God with this. You do not control events, but you do serve the One who does direct them intimately. If he is not moving in the big picture to your liking, just be patient and ask him what he wants you to know and do in your own LITTLE PART of his BIG PLAN! His will is always in your ultimate best interest!

**Next, we must deliberately develop our identity in Christ.** You can allow yourself to be all shook up by the massive shifts in society's morals and opinions, or you can stay rooted and grounded in the Word of God and continue to grow in your personal relationship with God. **When what you are learning CONFLICTS with what you believe, it is time to go back to the Word and reestablish your trust in God's ultimate authority in your life.** You will never regret this. I love the words that the Apostle Paul gave to us in the book of Colossians: **Colossians 2:8-10 NLT**

**8 Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. 9 For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. 10 So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.**

Rest in and live out that truth, and you will give the world a CULTURE SHOCK to remember. Let's pray.