

Life in Babylon

Daniel 1:1-21

INTRODUCTION: We will go back 6 centuries from our study of Paul. **GENRE** - The first question we must ask when approaching any book of the Bible is - what is the Genre? Genre means, type of literature. For example,

The word Bible comes from the Latin Biblia which means - A collection of Holy Books.

So the Bible is a book of books that from Genesis to Revelation, they tell one unfolding story of who God is and His plan to redeem those who would believe.

So each time you study a new book of the Bible, it is important that you ask - what Genre is this particular book?

You see while your bible is One Story by One Author - God used 40 different human authors over the period of 1,600 years, writing in a wide variety of literary genres.

One of the great mistakes people make when reading the bible is not allowing the mental shift necessary to move in and out of the different GENRES represented.

ILLUSTRATION: Now we are accustomed to doing this in modern writings. For example when you read the **newspaper** you make a mental shift when you move from an **editorial**, into the **comics**, then again as you read the **sports** section, yet again when you read the **classifieds**. Each is uniquely written and each assumes the reader knows something about it's genre.

But when people read the Bible they often fail to realize it is a similar compilation. That's why when they start reading the bible they love it until about levticus...

- Genesis - Historical Narrative
- Exodus - Historical Narrative
- Leviticus - Legal Discourse, it is to be read and understood differently.

Daniel is a unique in that it contains two different genres.

- Chapters 1-6 are Historical narrative
- Chapters 7-12 are Apocalyptic Discourse

The first 6 chapters are pretty straightforward and they are the most familiar to us, they include the fiery furnace, and the lion's den narrative. But then in chapter 12 we shift over to one of the most difficult types of literature there is - with a prophetic overview of history. In many ways - understanding Daniel is the key to understanding the book of Revelation.

The prophecies of Daniel are so specific that non believers argue there is no way that a human could have written future events so specifically. Liberal scholars argue that Daniel must have been written as if it were prophecy after the fact. But as those who traveled to Israel will remember - the fragments and quotes in the Dead Sea scrolls gave evidence that Daniel was written well before the events it records even took place.

CONTEXT: Daniel was born during the last days of the kingdom of Judah. If he was about fifteen years of age when taken captive in 605 b.c. Daniel and Ezekiel are both about the same age. Jeremiah and Habakkuk would have been preaching in Jerusalem when these boys were teenagers and they were both influenced by their teachings.

Daniel is the long distance runner of the OT. The book begins in his youth and concludes in his senior adult years.

He ran the gamut of the success Journey. His story begins as a victim of human trafficking and it ends with him leading the most powerful man in the world to Faith in the God of Israel.

You will meet a man in heaven name Naebucanezer - he will be there because of Daniel.

God in his Judgement removed Israel from their land, but God in his Mercy left men like Daniel among them so that the light of revelation would shine, even in a foreign land.

TEXT: Daniel 1:1-21 (ESV)

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

“Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,” was one of the greatest monarchs of ancient times. He was the predominant leader of the what is called the Neo-Babylonian Empire - the capital in Modern day Iraq.

Nebuchadnezzar led in a great expansion of Babylon’s territory along with extensive building campaigns including the hanging gardens of Babylon - one of the 7 wonders of the Ancient World. Remember that test question?

Well Nebuchadnezzar had just conquered Egypt at the battle of Carchemish in June of 605 BC and on his way home, he decided to go ahead and besiege Palestine as well.

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.

So note that, “The Lord gave” Jehoiakim King of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. This was a Divine judgement of God.

He lifted his protective hand of mercy and employed his punitive hand of judgement.

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.

So this was the custom of Babylon - when they conquered a people, they would take the best of the best and make them Palace servants. This also gives us an indication that Daniel may have been in the Kingly line - at the very least he was among the nobility of Israel.

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.

So these exceptional young people were going to be given an amazing education and training.

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.

So they are going to Babylon University. They were to begin the process of indoctrination in the ways of Babylon. They would have a Babylonian world view.

They would be taught to worship the demonic Babylonian Idols.
They would be taught to hold to a wicked, perverted Babylonian morality.

You say, “Pastor, I’m really glad that I don’t have to deal with those things”.

In the NT we are taught that the spirit of Babylon still exists and it has influence over much of the world in the last days. In **Revelation 17** this spirit is described as “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.”

It will find a place in every Kingdom on Earth - Sodom & Gomorrah, Nazi Germany, N Korea, Iran, cartels, trafficking, political platforms, media, entertainment, social media and most of all EDUCATION.

So we see these outstanding Hebrew young people are taken into this Demonically influenced environment.

⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

1. Develop Christian Friendships

While Babylon did a lot of things that would make it nearly impossible for these guys to stand for God, they forgot about one thing. They didn't separate them from each other.

You can stand a lot as long as you stand together.

The single most important question you will answer in the next 4 years is, ***“who will your tribe be?”*** If you get this one right, the other 300 questions will take care of themselves.

Let me strongly encourage to make it your number one priority to find a bible preaching, life giving church. Join that church and build your schedule around its schedule.

You may have a Fraternity, you may have a Sorority, you may be in the band, you may play sports - but you **must** have a church family.

You say, there are dozens of churches how do I know which one to pick? IT'S SO SIMPLE - Do they preach the Bible and stand on it's truth? Do they preach Jesus as the only way to Heaven?

If you have half way paid attention at this church you ought to recognize when a man is not grounding his sermon in the word of God. It may be cool, he may be a better communicator, you may like the music better... but are they giving you the WORD. If not, it is not a church.

Now there is a real sense in which - I could close the service and give an invitation right now.

If you join and commit yourself to the right church, you will marry the right spouse. There will be things we didn't prepare you for, but they will.

I am firmly convinced, there would be no Daniel if there had been no Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

But here is another thing,

Timothy Keller says of this passage (about Daniel and friends): don't **assimilate**, don't **separate**, but be deeply **involved**, engaged in the life of the city (Babylon).

Love the city of man, for the sake of the city of God.

Let me be honest - we are really good at finding a few christian friends and huddling up till the rapture... God wants you to turn your crew into an army and take the city.

Develop Christian Friendships...

2. Protect Your Christian Identity

⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

Those are all good, godly Hebrew names that speak of their relation to Yaweh the one true God.

But since Babylon ruled them, Babylon changed their names - and gave them names that were associated with their demonic idols.

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.

Changing their names speaks to changing their core identity.

You see, everything flows from our core identity.

Hebrew Name

Daniel "God is my judge"
Hananiah "Yahweh is gracious"
Mishael "Who is what God is?"
Azariah "Yahweh is my helper"

Babylonian Name

Belteshazzar "Bel protects his life"
Shadrach "The command of Aku"
Meshack "Who is what Aku is?"
Abed-Nego "Servant of Nebo"

Proverbs 23:7 As a man thinks within his heart, so is he.

ILLUSTRATION: Think of it this way - when my family moved to Moulton, AL we purchased a home right in the center of a chatelherault cattle ranch. I got to play cowboy every day. One thing my dad loved about our home-place was that it secured him "right-away" to the entire spread of land.

The spirit of Babylon doesn't was control of everything at first - it just wants that center acre of your heart, so that it has right-away to all the rest. That is why it goes after your identity.

Zig Ziglar - *It is impossible to perform consistently in a way that is inconsistent with how you see yourself.*

So often times it will put a name on you - YOU ARE THIS, NOT THAT.

- It may be an attractive label that you want to cultivate.
- It may be an offensive label that you want to run from.

For example: You are Popular - thus certain things are expected of you if you would like to remain popular.

For example: You are a religious nut, everything you say has to do with the bible.

Both labels seek to control you.

They may call you **Belteshazzar** but you remember that God calls you **Daniel**.

Now - I want to show you something that most studies miss...

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,

Now this chief of the Eunuchs is in charge of Daniel and his friends... what does that make them? Eunuchs.

Eunuchs were men who were emasculated so that they could serve the Kings wives without the King having to worry about something happening. *If you still don't understand - ask your wife to explain it to you after the service.*

There is something about the spirit of Babylon that wants to rob a young man of his manhood, or get him to pervert it by making him a bully.

You say Pastor our kids aren't ready for this - friend I have a daughter at the middle school and there are quite a few young ladies who identify themselves as lesbians.

I'll stay away from this subject when Satan agrees to do the same.

If you have a Biblical view of **Gender Roles**, that will be ground zero for Babylon University.

If God made you a young man, listen it doesn't matter what anybody says, you find a biblical role model for manhood and become what God made you to be.

If God made you a young lady, find a biblical role model and become what God created you to be.

You believe that sex is something that is kept for a husband and a wife to enjoy in the context of marriage. Don't you give an inch. Hold your ground and wait for the guy or girl that is seeking to do the same.

Not only will they seek to shape your identity...

3. Guard Your Christian Convictions

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.

Now what difference did it make if he ate the King's meat? Theologians believe that this meat had been ceremonially sacrificed to the Demonic Idols - and to eat the meat was sort of like our communion. It was an act of worship of these pagan deities.

Daniel said, "that's not going to happen".

Think about it - he had already cooperated in several things. The changing of his name, the education process, he dressed like they wanted... but something about this meat bothered his conscience.

That's how it goes - there will be some things that you will find perfectly fine as you deal with the spirit of Babylon, but there will be one particular compromise that something deep inside of you will say - there it is.

ILLUSTRATION: I heard a story this week about a young man who had maintained a very high GPA all through college then sought to get into Medical School. He was asked by the board, "will you perform an abortion?" He said, "No I will not" They said, well what if you are asked to do so? He said, "Look, I'm not going to picket and protest, but I would tell them that other people do that but I don't, I'm a Christian and I'd tell them why I wasn't comfortable doing so". They asked, "What if that keeps you from getting into this institution?" To which he replied, "I don't have to get into this school, but I have to honor my God". He didn't get in, went on to study elsewhere and later became one of the top surgeons in Dallas, TX.

The Chief Eunuch raises a concern in 10b

"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."

Do you see that? It wasn't obstinance, it wasn't a rebellious spirit - He offered a creative alternative and trusted God for the results.

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.

INVITATION: You say, Pastor if Babylon is so dangerous - why are we going? Let me read this to you by Andy Crouch and I'm done...

"The exile is also a sign of hope. God's people are placed in the midst of the religion-assimilating, privilege-seeking, royal-food-serving, power-serving, name-changing kingdoms of the world to bear witness to those kingdoms that they are not the last word. They are placed there because God loves the world, including Babylon, and wants his ways to be known everywhere, not just within a religious enclave."

Daniel went into his Babylon, and as a result there is a man in Heaven today named Nebuchadnezzar. A greater than Daniel has come into another Babylon. Our Lord came into this world that hated him and killed him... but because he did, you are in the Kingdom. You go into Babylon like Daniel, like Jesus - and dear child change the world.