

DANIEL'S CAPTIVITY (DANIEL 1:1-6)

Imagine that you're somewhere between 14-17 years old (I'm sure you can relate). Now imagine that the United States is suddenly overtaken by a foreign army and YOU and three friends are taken hostage to a far-away country. Think of the movie "TAKEN."

This is what happened to Daniel and his friends. They were taken to a far-away country and everything that brought them comfort and stability was taken from them – their family, home, religion, language, diet, even his names were taken!

Then imagine that your captors enroll you in a foreign university – *Babylon U* – and they tell you that you only have three years to *excel* at the teachings of this new culture, BUT you quickly realize that many of those teachings will be in direct opposition to God and His Word.



What will you do? How will you keep your faith intact at a secular university or job where most other people are NOT interested in honoring God? And will God remain faithful when your teachers, classmates, boss, co-workers -the entire culture – tries to force you into the fiery furnace of compromise?

This is the situation that Daniel and his friends find themselves in...

Daniel 1:1-6 "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, Mishaël, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah."

The story of Daniel is one of the most exciting stories in human history! It reads like an action movie – like a political thriller.¹ The book of Daniel happens in one of the darkest moments of Israel's history. The city of Jerusalem was overtaken by a foreign army, and many of the Israelites were taken hostage and carried away to a place called Babylon.

So tonight, as we kick off this series, I want to give you four important details that will help us get our bearings on the main characters and Daniel's situation...

1. The person behind Daniel's captivity.

Verse 1 says, "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." History tells us some interesting facts about this king called Nebuchadnezzar...

- **He was a genius on the battlefield.** He was known as a master military architect. He ruled for 43 years in Babylon after becoming famous for defeating the Egyptians (battle of Carchemish).²
- **He was a brilliant architect.** He was responsible for one of the 7 wonders of the world – the famous *Hanging Gardens of Babylon*. These were massive gardens he built for one of his wives who came from a place where there were mountains and lots of vegetation, so Nebuchadnezzar constructed a massive artificial mountain with gardens that hung down the side of this structure.

It looked like these gardens were growing in mid-air and his architects designed an ingenious system to hoist water over 300 feet from the Euphrates River to water these gardens. Nebuchadnezzar's main palace was around 630,000 square feet in size.³ It truly was one of the 7 wonders of the world!

- **He was a brutal dictator.** Just a couple of examples: Jeremiah 39 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar forced the king of Judah to watch his own sons be murdered; then they immediately gouged out the eyes of the Israelite king so the last thing he ever saw was the death of his sons and the end of his legacy. Also, Nebuchadnezzar took other rulers of Judah and literally roasted them to death over a fire. His power and cruelty was unmatched.⁴

¹ As described by Ben Stuart

² Barry, J. D., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Da 1:1). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

³ From "gods at war" by Kyle Idelman

⁴ From "gods at war" by Kyle Idelman

2. The place of Daniel's captivity.

Verse 2 tells us that Babylon was located in "the land of Shinar" which is modern day Iraq. And if the "land of Shinar" sounds familiar to you, it's because that was the site of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9; 10:10).

Throughout the Bible, Babylon consistently represents rebellion, pride, and idolatry against God and His people. And THIS is where Daniel was taken!

- 1. Historical Rebellion:** Babylon's roots go back to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), where people united in pride to build a tower to the heavens, defying God's command to fill the earth. God judged them by confusing their language and scattering them. This event set the tone for Babylon as a symbol of human arrogance and resistance to God.
- 2. Idolatry and Wickedness:** Babylon became a center of pagan worship and idolatry. The Babylonians worshiped false gods and practiced occult arts, which directly violated God's commands (Isaiah 47:12-13; Jeremiah 50:2).
- 3. Enemy of God's People:** Babylon conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and took the Israelites into exile (2 Kings 25:1-21; Psalm 137:1). This act of aggression against God's chosen people made Babylon a symbol of opposition to God's purposes.
- 4. Prophetic Symbol:** In the prophets and later in Revelation, Babylon is used as a symbol for all worldly systems that oppose God. Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied Babylon's downfall as a judgment from God (Isaiah 13-14; Jeremiah 50-51). In Revelation, "Babylon the Great" represents the ultimate system of evil, immorality, and opposition to God that will be judged at the end of time (Revelation 17-18).⁵

3. The people taken in Daniel's captivity.

Verse 6 says, "Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah." You see, Nebuchadnezzar's strategy was different from most other conquering kings. Other kings (and their army) would often rape all the women, behead the men and stack their heads against the city wall. They would burn the city, cut down all the trees, and spread salt over the land so nothing would grow.

⁵ Faithbot.io

But the Babylonians were a bit more sophisticated. Nebuchadnezzar's policy was to take the best and brightest people from the nations he had conquered and allow them to serve in his government. He could benefit from Daniel's knowledge of his own people, and he could also use their skills to strengthen his own administration.⁶

According to verse 4, Daniel and his friends were "youth" – a word meaning they were most likely between 14–17 years old.⁷ And the king of Babylon noticed that these four teenagers stood out from the others in three different ways (vs.4)...

- **They stood out *physically*.** They had to be "without blemish" and "of good appearance." In other words, they were old enough to make the adjustment psychologically but young enough to learn easily. They were old enough to travel the 900 miles to Babylon, but young enough to be strong yet impressionable.
- **They stood out *intellectually*.** They had to be "skillful in all wisdom" and "endowed with knowledge [and] understanding." In other words, a high IQ was mandatory.
- **They stood out *socially*.** These young men had to be "competent to stand in the king's palace." You see, it wasn't just about intelligence. They had to have poise and the right personality that would allow them to function in a royal setting without causing embarrassment to the king.⁸ These young men were going to rub shoulders with kings, queens, and dignitaries from around the world.

They were the best and the brightest. They belonged to the tribe of Judah, which was the line of kings (vs.6). They were of royal birth (vs.3). These boys were handsome, healthy, intelligent, talented, well-liked by others, *and* devoted to the Lord.

In other words, their lives were well-balanced, very much like Jesus when He was a teenager...

Luke 2:52 "Jesus increased in wisdom [*intellectually*] and in stature [*physically*] and in favor with God and man [*socially*]."



So, why would God intentionally allow Daniel and his friends to be captured and taken to such a place?

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (2000). *Be resolute* (p. 13). Victor.

⁷ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *The MacArthur study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Da 1:4). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁸ *Agents of Babylon* study guide by David Jeremiah; pg. 11-12

4. The purpose for Daniel's captivity.

God is never doing just *one* thing in a particular situation. As with Daniel, God is often doing *several* different things at once. For example...

- **God was fulfilling His promise to Israel.**

For hundreds of years God had warned His people that this would happen if they didn't repent of their sin and idolatry...

Deuteronomy 28:15; 20; 49-50 'But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you... ⁴⁹ The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, ⁵⁰ a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.'

2 Chronicles 36:15–16 "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy."

So, God was simply fulfilling His promise to His people. If they persisted in their sin, He would discipline them. They did, so He did.

- **God was showing His sovereignty over all nations.**

In verse 2 it says the Lord gave Judah into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. You see, it wasn't Nebuchadnezzar's military might or brilliance that brought Israel's captivity. It was the Sovereign God of the universe using a foreign king to discipline His own people!

- **God was sending Daniel as a witness to a lost culture.**

Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations but instead they became prideful and self-focused. And because they wouldn't willingly go to the nations, God shipped them off to the nations in captivity.

You see, Nebuchadnezzar thought he was invading Jerusalem, but this

was actually an invasion of *Babylon* by the best and brightest of God's people!

- **God was preparing the way for the coming Messiah.**

As we'll see later, Daniel eventually becomes "chief" of all the wise men in Babylon (5:11). This is why we read in Matthew 2 that "wise men from the east came to Jerusalem" to worship Jesus (vs.1).



How did these men from the east know about the coming Messiah? How did they know to look for a star that would announce the birth of the Messiah?

Because God had sent Daniel all those years earlier to teach them the prophecies of the coming Messiah (Num. 24:17; Isa. 60:3).

You see, God had a clear purpose for Daniel's captivity. God had a purpose for putting Daniel in a lost culture where very few people knew about the true God. And in this series, we'll learn a lot about OUR purpose by looking at DANIEL'S purpose.

But that doesn't mean it was easy for these young men. In fact, next week we'll see Daniel's first big test as soon as he arrived in Babylon. So, I hope you'll be back next week (with a friend) to find out what happens!

No Small Groups

- SLT meeting this Sunday at 4:30 here in the Youth Center.
- DGROUPS will begin in three weeks (Sept 7th). Sign up!
- Youth Camp registrations will open soon. Reserve your spot fast!