



Daniel - Thriving in Babylon

Part 1 - The Temptation to Compromise

Key Passage:

Daniel 1:8 (ESV)

⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank.

Christians must recognize the times in which they live. It is a harrowing truth for the American church to consider, but the United States of America teeters on the edge of complete socio-moral collapse. Larry Osborne describes the weight of the situation this way:

"We live in a world gone haywire. Our moral fabric seems to be decaying at breakneck speed. Things that were once shamefully hidden are now publicly celebrated. The previously unimaginable has become commonplace. In a few short decades our culture's response to Bible-believing Christians has gone from grudging respect, to a patronizing pat on the head, to a marginalizing indifference, to outright hostility."

While it can be tempting to panic at the moral degradation of American culture, our obligation as Christians is to honor God even when our culture does not. Daniel, writing in the sixth century, lived amongst the people of Babylon, a nation considered to be one of the most morally perverse in all of human history. Although America continues to chase after the heights of Babylonian immorality, Daniel demonstrates what it looks like for a Christian to thrive in the midst of godlessness. To live in Babylon, we must remain committed to Christ with the expectation that there will be a great temptation to compromise.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
- What is something the group can be praying about?
- What is something the group can praise this week?

- What are some bad areas in our culture today that people are facing strong temptation to participate in?
- Do you feel like you can truly thrive as a Christian in the current culture we are living in?



BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Historical Context

Daniel 1:1-2 (ESV)

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.

Long before Babylon's triumph over Judah, the Jewish kingdom was fractured beyond repair. Rather than a unified and holy light shining amongst the nations of the world, the light had been refracted into two separate nations at odds with one another. The northern kingdom, Israel, was the first to fall, overtaken by the Assyrian empire in the year 720 BC. The southern kingdom, Judah, was beset by the Babylonians in the year 605 BC, the 'third year of the reign of Jehoiakim' as Daniel records it. This was but the first of three sieges Jerusalem suffered under the Babylonians, resulting in the displacement of thousands of Jews.

Although Nebuchadnezzar undoubtedly accredited his defeat of Judah to the Babylonian God, Daniel considered Judah's fall the work of the Lord Himself. The prophet Jeremiah, who began his prophetic mission around the year 627 BC, foretold of Judah's coming destruction to the Jewish people years prior, but they refused to listen. The Lord's decision to have Babylon gain victory over His people was made abundantly clear:

Jeremiah 6:27-30 (ESV)

²⁷ "I have made you a tester of metals among my people,

that you may know and test their ways.

²⁸ They are all stubbornly rebellious, going about with slanders; they are bronze and iron;

all of them act corruptly.

²⁹ The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on,

for the wicked are not removed.

³⁰ Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them."

God's patience with the nations has its limit, and the Jews were no exception. Their faithlessness and idolatry had risen to a level whereby such could no longer be tolerated.

In many ways, modern America faces the same dilemma; a country once blessed by the Lord has now turned its back on Him and as a result, He has given America up to its sinful desires. This was the context of Daniel's time just prior to the exile, an unholy nation who turned their face from God and received due judgment. The church must now learn to navigate through similar national waters.



The ultimate fate of the United States is uncertain to say the least. We should pray that God would turn the hearts of the American people back towards His Son Jesus and restore America to the fear of the Lord that the country was originally founded upon.

1. You Will Be Pushed to Compromise

Daniel 1:3-7 (ESV)

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. 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.

The Hebrew word for 'youths' probably refers to teenagers, a good estimate being somewhere around the age of 15. This means that when Daniel and his friends were taken captive in Jerusalem and taken to Babylon, they were likely no older than someone today in their freshman year of high school. Imagine then the intense pressure to conform to the customs of Babylonian society and to compromise his convictions. It would be difficult enough for a grown adult to resist the allure of Babylonian civilization and its decadence; Daniel was merely a child, taken from both his home and his family.

Notice the pressure here specifically. According to the text, Daniel was given the opportunity to become an educated man of great esteem within the Babylonian government. He would learn 'the literature and language of the Chaldeans' for three years, what was essentially an ancient university-style education in that time. He would be without want of any material need as the king was personally offering food and drink from his own table! And to top it all off, the Babylonians would give Daniel a new name; he could leave his old Jewish identity behind and be one of them.

The world wants us to *think* like them, *talk* like them, and *believe* like them. Ultimately, the pressure here is to *sin* like them. In our country, and across the world for that matter, Christians are faced with the same choice to forsake Christ and enjoy the momentary pleasures of this world. The same re-education that came for Daniel comes for us. It can be clearly seen in the movies we watch, the schools we send our kids to, the flags that glory in sin, the music we listen to, and the social media we scroll through. Yet when we look at Daniel, despite the overwhelming pressure to conform and immerse himself completely within the Babylonian world, he refused to compromise.



Daniel 1:8 (ESV)

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.

Because he was a Jew, Daniel's obedience to the Lord meant he could not partake of non-Kosher meat, such as horseflesh and pork, or wine that had been offered to Babylonian gods. Living as Christians today, our obedience will take different forms in response to different issues.

In this environment, we must learn to "be in the world, but not of the world." This means that, although we are surrounded by the pressures to conform to the world, we do not surrender our convictions in response to that pressure. Daniel underwent formal Babylonian training, but he never succumbed and internalized the message. Rather, Daniel's sight was set firmly on God; take note of his countenance later in chapter two:

Daniel 2:20-23 (ESV)

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
 to whom belong wisdom and might.
²¹ **He** changes times and seasons;
 he removes kings and sets up kings;
 he gives wisdom to the wise
 and knowledge to those who have understanding;
²² he reveals deep and hidden things;
 he knows what is in the darkness,
 and the light dwells with him.
²³ To you, O God of my fathers,
 I give thanks and praise,
 for you have given me wisdom and might,

Daniel clearly believed something radically different than the prevailing message of his culture. Daniel was *in* Babylon, but he was not of Babylon. He was committed to honoring God with his life, even if it might cost him. In this case, Daniel's faithfulness was used by God to exalt Himself above Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian gods. In verse 15, we see that after eating nothing but vegetables and drinking nothing but water, Daniel and his friends were much healthier than their Babylonian counterparts who partook of the king's food. The Bible does not endorse vegetarianism, but the story demonstrates how God can use one's faithfulness in mighty ways.

2. Compromise Will Push You to Commit to What Doesn't Matter

Compromise is really just a matter of commitment. We compromise when we feel compelled to commit to something else more than we commit to God. In Babylon, Daniel had the opportunity to compromise and commit his life to the things of Babylon; the path of least resistance is certainly much easier after all. However, compromising would have meant committing himself to false gods who were of no use and material possessions he couldn't take with him when it was all said and done. If this text is going to shape us properly, we must consider as Christians what



our commitments truly are in this world. Daniel chose to honor and serve God; what we need is that same conviction that says I am convinced that Christ is Lord, so I will live accordingly.

3. You Will Thrive When You Are Committed to Being Close to God

Daniel 1:17-21 (ESV)

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.

Because Daniel honored God, God honored him in return. He and his friends were given 'learning and skill in all literature and wisdom' by God. Daniel was specifically granted 'understanding in all visions and dreams' as a reward for his faithfulness. This is in no way an advocacy for "the prosperity gospel" in which obedience to God guarantees special material or spiritual benefit. Rather, the teaching of the text reflects a general principle seen throughout Scripture: God honors those who honor God. The Lord did not arbitrarily bestow these gifts upon Daniel and his friends either; God had a plan to use them in a greater way because of their commitment to Him.

Because of their obedience, God placed them in a position where they could influence the very king of Babylon himself! Notice what the result was of their God-given proficiencies: '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.' Daniel became one of Nebuchadnezzar's personal counselors, and quite literally 'stood before the king' until the 'first year of King Cyrus.' Cyrus was the king of the Persian empire, the nation that would overtake Babylon 70 years later. In other words, Daniel was used in a big way for a really long time!

The life we are after is one that is favored by God; this is truly abundant life, the 'life to the fullest' that Jesus was talking about. To be clear, Daniel's refusal to compromise did not mean everything went smoothly. He was presented with special opportunities to serve God, but he still faced persecution and setbacks; the famous story of Daniel in the lion's den is proof enough of that fact. Choosing to commit to God will not guarantee an easy life; it will actually lead to the opposite. The question is how big do you want God to use you? The answer is found in how greatly we are willing to make God the priority of our life even when the culture around us is decaying and inviting us to join in its debauchery.



BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- In what ways is the United States of America similar to Judah right before it fell? How is it similar to Babylon in Daniel's time?
- What is the pressure to compromise at its core? What are you really doing when you choose to compromise?
- In what areas of your life do you feel you are being pushed to compromise as a Christian?
- What did Daniel's life look like when he refused to compromise? How does that inform us today as Christians looking to remain faithful in America?