

Daniel: How to Thrive in Babylon

Message One – The Culture Shift

Introduction: I want to welcome you all to the first message of our **new**, six-week teaching series, entitled **Daniel: How to Thrive in Babylong**. Together, over the next six weeks, we are diving into the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Plug: We are also kicking off a brand new small group study that follows the series. This week is the **Small Groups Launch Party + Open House**. Great time to get into a small group!

Today, let me begin with a **question** – *What do we do as Christians when the culture around us shifts around us?* What do we do when the pressure mounts?

Culture can be defined as *the beliefs and customs of a particular society, group, place, or time. It's a way of thinking, living and behaving that exists in a certain place.* A culture shift doesn't always mean a change in geographical location. You can be in the exact same place but have the culture change all around you.

As a pastor, my primary responsibility is to help prepare you for the *unprecedented shifts* that are currently taking place and coming in the near future. If you will stick with us through this series, it's my prayer that you'll learn how you can stand firm and even flourish amidst *the shifts of culture*.

So, "Pastor, **why study** the book of Daniel?" *Great question.* Here are **four** ways I'd answer that question:

Three Reasons We Are Studying Daniel:

1. Daniel's situation is similar to our own. For most of his life, Daniel lived as a Believer in a culture that did not reflect his values. From the time he was a teenager until the time he died - around the age of 90, he served under a series of foreign kings. He never had the luxury of living in a place surrounded by people

who believed as he did. From the book of Daniel, we will draw many useful principles as we seek to live for Christ in a world that is increasingly becoming at-odds with our faith.

2. Daniel's prophecies will be fulfilled. This book is filled with dreams, visions, and prophecies about the End Times. In the weeks to come, we will discover an amazing connection between the words of Daniel and our life in the 21st century.

3. Daniel's God is our God. —and He is still in control. This may be the most important lesson of the book. God is in charge! **Simple and clear.** He is in charge of nations, families, and individuals. He is in charge of the past, the present, and the future. Studying this book will increase our confidence in the sovereignty of God.

Daniel is a great example of how a Godly person lives when the culture is shifting all around him.

Please open with me in your Bible to Daniel 1.

Background & Context

Daniel is in the Old Testament in a grouping of books called the Major Prophets. It's right after Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Ezekiel.

- In order to place the book firmly in our minds, here's a little **background**. Daniel lived around 400 years after King David and 600 years before Jesus. The book covers the period 605 BC to about 530 BC.
- In the beginning, Daniel is a teenager, approximately 15 years old. When the book closes, he is about 90. During his long life, God allowed him to serve under a succession of Babylonian and Persian rulers.
- From being an imported hostage, he becomes a trusted prime minister and counselor to some of the mightiest rulers in world history.

The book of Daniel is broken down into **two key sections** – *the practical and the prophetic*. The first half, the initial six chapters

focus in on the **person** of Daniel. While the second half, the final six chapters focus in on the **prophetic**.

- Daniel is perhaps the most prophetic book in the Bible and is known as the key that unlocks the New Testament book of Revelation. *By the way, I'm hoping to teach that book at some time next year.*

Even Jesus called Daniel the beloved prophet and quoted extensively from Daniel. *The Book of Daniel confounds the critics – but it comforts the Christian because it **confirms our faith**.*

So now, let's identify some of the **main players**. **Three Primary Characters** take the stage in the opening chapter of Daniel.

1. First, there is **Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians**. They represent the world system and a culture that is hostile to the people of God. *Remember that Babylon in the Bible is always - with no exceptions - a symbol for evil and paganism.*
2. Second, there's **Daniel and his three friends**. They represent the believer in the world, *living* to obey God in the midst of a dramatic culture shift.
3. Finally, there is the **The Sovereign Lord**, who places His children in the world and purposes to bring them safely to Him in the end.

When the book opens we find Daniel and his friends being forcibly **taken from their homes** in Jerusalem and deported east 500 miles to Babylon. *There these godly teens will undergo an enormous culture shift as they train to work for a pagan king in a foreign country.* Let's dig in and see...

DANIEL AND OPERATION ASSIMILATION

1. **Culture tries to give us a new language, learning and laws.**

Let's look at **Daniel 1:3-5**: Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of

Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, ⁴ young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, ***SLIDE BREAK***

who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. ⁵ And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, ***SLIDE BREAK*** and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.

You could call these verses **Operation: Assimilation**. It begins with a selection process aimed at the cream-of-the-crop of Jewish teenage boys.

This is very clever and also very seductive.

2. Culture targets the young.

Nebuchadnezzar called in his Vice-President of Human Resources—Ashpenaz, and gave him **a three-step plan for re-educating** these sharp young Jewish teenagers.

- Step one was a full scholarship to Babylon State University, the Ivy League of the ancient world. There they would learn the Babylonian language, as well as science, math, astrology, commerce, and history.
- Step two was to offer them free food from the King's Buffet. It was all-you-can-eat - all the time. Even back then, they knew that the way to a young man's heart is through his stomach.

Illustration: I attended a liberal arts college and studied history. I had this professor that constantly gave his opinion on history devoid from every sharing other perspectives... By the way, *proper education is about teaching people how to think, not what to think.*

A culture that doesn't honor God will ultimately attempt to change language, learning, and laws to bring a shift in the mind and heart.

3. Culture attempts to give you a new name

A culture that doesn't honor God will always try to rename you! Look at **Daniel 1:7**: To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

Daniel and his friends were given new names and they had the option of letting these names define them.

Daniel which means "God is my Judge" was labeled **Belteshazzar** – which means, "Bel, protect the king".

Hananiah means, "The Lord is gracious" was labeled **Shadrach** – which in Babylonian means, "Command of Aku", the Babylonian moon-god.

Mishael means, "Who is like the Lord?" was relabeled **Meshach** – meaning "Who is like Aku?" Again Aku being the Babylonian moon-god.

Azariah means, "The Lord is my helper" and was renamed **Abednego** – which means "Servant of the Shining One, or Nebo," yet another Babylonian god.

While they do not seem to protest the names verbally, their **actions** demonstrate that they are still loyal to their Jewish upbringing and the worship of one God - Yahweh. There's power in a name.

Do you identify with any names above Jesus.

Philippians 2:10

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

The Babylonian Culture attempted to steal Daniel and his friend's identity. – Instead, Daniel knew how to keep his identity secure – he treasured the Word of the Lord in his heart and he was wise in his dealings with others. So...

As we close:

How do we respond when culture shifts?

Daniel 1:8 says: But Daniel **purposed in his heart** that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

This verse is so important – because of what Daniel did. He **"purposed in his heart!"** He settled the issue to live as a follower of God. He knew God and he knew the truth. He was a man of commitment, conviction, and courage – and he knew who God had called him to be and what God called him to do. Daniel stood firm. This is how we should respond:

We stand firm in our commitment to God. We stand on our convictions. We stand up with courage.

Earlier this week I happened to run across something called **"The Fellowship of the Unashamed."** I love it because it describes the kind of attitude that will help us stand in the face of a culture that is shifting.

I am a part of the Fellowship of the Unashamed. I have Holy Spirit Power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line.

The decision has been made. I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.

My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, worldly talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, platitudes, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, love by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide is reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, back up, let up, or shut up until I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and spoken up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus Christ. I must go until He returns, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He stops me. ^[SEP] And when He comes to get His own, He will have no problem recognizing me.

My colors will be clear.

That was the heart of Daniel. Let's pray.