

Daniel 1:1-21**Daniel's Training in Babylon**

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 delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—

4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. **5** The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. **7** The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. **9** Now God had

caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

1 Peter 2:11-25

Living Godly Lives in a Pagan Society

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Sermon: “There is a God in Babylon”

Please turn your Bible to **Daniel chapter 1** – starting at verse 1. We will briefly mention our New Testament reading from 1 Peter 2.

There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

Context

[Slide-Context and music]

In **605BC** King **Nebuchadnezzar** of **Babylon** **invaded** the Southern Kingdom of Israel – **Judah** – and **razed the temple** in Jerusalem to the ground and **carried the people of Judah off into exile** in the foreign land of **Babylon**.

We **opened the service** this morning with **Psalms 137** which **described** how the **people of Judah were feeling** – as they sat by the **river** in **Babylon** – they’re **devastated**, and they’ve **hung their harps on the trees** – and they don’t feel like playing their harps - nor singing and praising God

‘How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’

And their **Babylonian captors** are **taunting** them – “*sing us one of your songs from Zion*” – Zion is the mountain in Jerusalem.

[Slide-Context]

Christian **missionary Elisabeth Elliott** was **widowed** when her first husband was **martyred** in 1956 – **killed by an Ecuadorian tribe** they were sharing the Gospel with. **Elisabeth continued to minister** to these **tribes for two years** after this tragedy. **Elisabeth tells** how helpful reading the **Apostle’s Creed** was as she grieved. The **Creed helped** her to **answer the question**:

“What things have NOT changed even though my husband has died?”

We could imagine the people from Judah in exile – asking that same question –

*“What has **NOT** changed even though we are in exile in Babylon?”*

Daniel chapter 1 answers that question:

God has NOT changed – He’s still there – wherever “there” is!

God is present – in His Sovereign Role (vv1-2)

[Slide-Sovereign]

As we look at v1 – King **Jehoiakim** is **ruling Judah** when King **Nebuchadnezzar** **attacks** Jerusalem.

And notice –in v2 – **God is present – in His sovereign role** – He has supreme power and rule over **ALL things**.

You see - it’s the Lord – in v2 - **who delivers King Jehoiakim into**

Nebuchadnezzar’s hands. And some of the **articles from the temple** in Jerusalem are **taken away** and **placed in the temple of Marduk** in **Babylon**.

The **Lord God** allows this, and – if the media were there - it would 'appear' to them - and to the Babylonians - that - not only is **King Nebuchadnezzar** and the **Babylonian army** - greater than - **King Jehoiakim and the army of Judah**- but also - the **Babylonians gods** are greater than **Israel's God!**

What we are meant to see is **a theme** that **runs through the whole Bible**

The **World's Kingdoms** versus **God's Kingdom**

Babylon represents the **city of the world** – versus - **Jerusalem** which represents the **city of God**

This conflict can be traced throughout scripture (see Revelation 14:8; 17:5; 18:2-24) – and finds its beginning in Genesis 3:15 when God says that Jesus will crush Satan's head and finds its end in Revelation (see Revelation 14:8; 17:5; 18:2-24)

The **Lord God** allows this – because the **Lord God** must fulfil the curses He pronounced to Israel - long before any exile – these curses were foreshadowed – if **Israel disobeyed God** (Lev 26:27-4 and Deut 28:38-68). And we know from our studies of 2 Kings last year – that's pretty much what Israel and Judah did for centuries – **they continued to disobey God and worship false gods!**

And **God's** finally had a gut-full of their disobedience – so off they go to exile!

But **God's** still in control – God's the one who **allowed Nebuchadnezzar** to be **His instrument to punish Judah!**

Application – from this we can draw comfort and confidence – that no matter what's happening in our lives – and no matter what's happening in the World right now – **God is present – in His Sovereign role!**

Don't fall for the media and Babylonian take on things – that God is defeated and powerless!

(pause)

God is present – in His Silent Role (vv3-16)

Which brings us to the second point

[Slide-Silent heading]

God is present – in His Silent Role – that's verses 3 to 16

The story continues in v3 & 4 – King **Nebuchadnezzar** orders his chief official **Ashpenaz** to start a system of indoctrination – to bring all the **best of the Israelite royal family and noblemen** into the King's service.

Only young men who are '*without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand*' are included.

It's like **Nebuchadnezzar** is **building a master race** (where have we heard that before!)

These young men – v5 – are to **eat royal food and wine** – and **to be trained for 3 years** before entering the King's service – by which time they'll be

"Babylonianized"

V6 - The chapter **focuses on four** of these **young men** from Judah – **Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël and Azariah**.

The meaning of their **names** is **important**:

Daniel means '*God is my judge*'

Hananiah means *‘Yahweh has been gracious’*

Mishael means *‘Who is what God is?’*

Azariah means *‘Yahweh has helped’*

[‘**el**’ suffix means **God** – ‘**ah**’ suffix means **Yahweh**

But their **names** – v7 – are to also be **“Babylonianized”** too!

Daniel becomes **Belteshazzar** which means *‘prince of the god Bel’*

Hananiah becomes **Shadrach** which means *‘lit up by the sun god – Shamash’*

Mishael becomes **Meshach** which means *‘who is like the god Aku or Abu?’*

And **Azariah** becomes **Abednego** which means *‘servant of the god Nabu’*

Again, we’re meant to see this **theme** of the World’s gods - versus - the One True God of Israel

(pause)

What **Nebuchadnezzar** is doing is **taking control of every aspect** of these young exiles’ lives!

They are told - what to eat – what to learn – and what to be called – and their **new names** are associated with **Babylonian false gods!**

But we read in verse 8 that **Daniel** makes a stand: ***Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine***

There are **several reasons** for **Daniel’s decision:**

- Some of the **King's food** might not be **allowed under the Jewish Law** – some meats like **pork** were forbidden – and also the food might not have been **prepared to Jewish standards** (i.e., not kosher)
- Also – most likely the **food** would have been **offered to false gods and idols**
- More importantly **Daniel's faith in God** and the **God's forgiveness** have made **Daniel clean**. This was a **cleansing from the idolatry** of the surrounding world and the **moral pollution** that came with it.

Daniel's faith meant a **call to a new and different life**. To Daniel the **Jewish food laws and customs** kept him separate and clean from the world – they were to him **signs and symbols of this inner cleansing** he had.

If Daniel were to compromise on these laws – he was **allowing himself to be drawn back into customs and behaviour he had been cleansed from**. For Daniel to compromise on the food was to **open the door to sin in his life**

- A bit like what **Jesus** said in the **Sermon on the Mount** – Matthew 5:29-30:
If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.
- **Application**: Surely that's the **lesson we learn here from Daniel's stand**. We need to cut out of our lives, attitudes, habits, and behaviour which defile our hearts and minds

Things like: dishonesty, greed, immorality, harmful media and entertainment, unforgiveness and bitterness, pride, ego and self-righteousness, idolatry and materialism, gossip and slander

We need to renew our hearts and minds by absorbing God's Word and applying it to our lives

(pause)

[Slide-Silent role]

- And look how God works here – **in His silent role**
- **Daniel** has **made a stand** on what he will and will not eat
- **God respects that about Daniel** – and in verse 9 - ***God caused the chief official to show favour and compassion to Daniel***
- **God is silently at work**
- Even though – verse 10 - the **chief official is not keen** on Daniel's request to not defile himself by eating the King's food – because the chief official **fears for his head**
- **God arranges** – in verses 11 to 14 - for **Daniel to deal with the guard** assigned to him – rather than the chief official – and **God also arranges** for the **guard** to agree to a **10-day diet trial** – where Daniel and his three friends stick to **Daniel's vegetable and water diet** – rather than the **King's roast beef and Yorkshire pudding with wine diet!**

- Now I'm not a dietician or a nutritionist – but every vegetarian person I've ever met – is usually **underweight** – **definitely not overweight** – and sometimes look like they could do with a feed – and can even look unhealthy
- So – I have to say – I'm surprised to read in verse 15 – that - *at the end of the ten days Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.*
- This can only be because – **God is present – in His silent role!**
- The **result of the successful diet trial** – v16 – **Daniel's vegetable and water diet is adopted permanently** by Daniel and his three friends.

Application: Notice too – how gently, courteously and appealingly Daniel raised the issue with the chief official, Ashpenaz, choosing the **right moment and right place to approach him** - and trying to win Ashpenaz over with **wisdom and tact**. Surely a lesson for us?

We must understand – **Daniel's options in protesting were few**. When people wanted to protest in those days, **they did not carry placards** - or **march through the streets** - or **lie down in awkward places blocking the road**.

And no-one in those days **would have dreamed of calling anyone in authority a 'pig'**. What we learn is that when people conduct themselves in a godly manner - and take time to make their case clear and rational and logical and courteously - and they follow God's wisdom - **they leave room for God to enter the situation and to work His will**. And notice it's **often silently and behind the scenes!**

God is present – He turns bad into good (vv17-20)

[Slide-Good and Bad]

Daniel's stand on his diet

Leads to another aspect of God – in verses 17 to 20

And that is – **God is present – He turns bad into good**

Throughout the Bible – **we see a God who reverses fortunes**

Back in verses 1 and 2 – the **people of Judah** – who were carried off into exile – **were seen as losers** – they've lost their **homes** – their **land** – their **place of worship** – they appear to have even **lost their God**

But look at verse 17 –

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

Who gave them knowledge and understanding of all this Babylonian literature and learning?

God!

Who gave Daniel the ability to understand visions and dreams of all kinds?

God!

Those **losers of verses 1 and 2** – have become **winners!**

See how God works here – these guys are winners alright!

V18 & 19 – when these guys – enter into service for the King – *the King found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaiah and Azariah*

And v20 – The King *found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.*

What an **awesome God** – He is!

(pause)

When the first two people God created – **Adam and Eve - disobeyed God** in the Garden of Eden – and **ate fruit** from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden – **all humankind became losers** – we became sinful in nature and we were **destined for the punishment of death and separation from God** – in **Hell!**

But God – **turned BAD into GOOD**

He **sent** His Son **Jesus**

And even when His **Son** was **rejected** and **arrested** and **falsely convicted on trumped up charges** – and **crucified**

God still – **turned BAD into GOOD.**

The day of Jesus' crucifixion became **GOOD FRIDAY**

Through His death – **all who believe in Jesus can become winners** – because for those who believe - Jesus took the punishment of sin - off them and on to Himself – and **graciously gave them forgiveness.**

And with it – **came more GOOD** – when **Jesus rose** from the dead – **He defeated the BAD of DEATH** – and gave all who believe **the GOOD of ETERNAL LIFE** to look forward to in **Heaven** one day!

If we pause and reflect – and look back on our lives – **we will all see times when - even our BAD-ist moments – somehow God has turned them around into GOOD– in His own perfect timing and in His own perfect way!**

God is present – in His Sustaining Role (v21)

[Slide-Sustaining]

Now there's **one more aspect of God in this chapter** – and it's in the **last verse** – v21 – which says:

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

This verse tells us – **God is present – in His sustaining role**

God sustains Daniel – he **outlives Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire** – which will be **replaced by King Cyrus and the Persian Empire!**

Nebuchadnezzar might think he's the ant's pants – but his days are numbered – **God is in control – God's not been defeated** – He's used Nebuchadnezzar to punish the Israelites – but **God's purpose is for the exiles to learn from their disobedience and then return to Israel – as a faithful remnant – after 70 years**
[Jeremiah 25:12]

God is also in control of the rise and fall of Kingdoms like: Babylon, Persia, the Medes, the Greeks and the Romans. And where **are they now?**

You see - God is present and sustains His people for His everlasting Kingdom!

Response (1 Peter 2:12)

How will we respond this morning to Daniel chapter 1?

Phil 3:20 tells us - *our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ*

So just like the people of Judah – **we are living in exile – in our own Babylon – Babylon represents this dark and fallen world – and we're meant to be living in Heaven**

And **there's times in our lives** when we **feel like the exiles** sitting on the side of the river in Babylon – **wondering where God is in our lives** – and we've hung our harps on the poplar tree – and feel like giving up – and we don't feel like worshipping God – **He feels far away**

But **this chapter shows us - God IS with us**

He allows things to happen – but **He always has a purpose**

We need to be like Daniel – and **faithfully trust God** – and **choose not to go the Babylonian way** – and choose not to conform to the patterns of this world
(Romans 12:2)

And from our NT reading – 1 Peter 2 – **I just want to highlight one verse – v12 - as our response** this morning:

[Slide-1 Peter 2:12]

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

The way we conduct ourselves as Christians - living in a dark and fallen world – will
be noticed – even by non-Christians. And the apostle Peter is saying – the non-
Christians – **will see our faith in action** – and see our good deeds – and **glorify**
God – and they may come to follow Jesus too! That's Daniel's response in chapter
 1 – and it must be our response!

Let's pray...

*Father God as we wait to enter our eternal home in heaven – help us to live our
 lives in exile on this Earth – without conforming to the patterns of this world – and
 to live with faithfulness and righteousness –and in such a way that people see the
 love of Jesus in us – and would want to come and follow Him too. In Jesus Name,
 Amen.*