

GROWTH + GROUPS

NAVIGATE LIFE TOGETHER

Maranatha Chapel Sermon Based Study Guide
SB 1.07.2024

THE POWER OF CONVICTIONS— DANIEL 1:1-21

Receiving the Message and Relating to the Study

What insights, principles or observations stood out to you from this week's message? Discuss with your group.

Pastor Daniel tells us, "I don't think I need to convince anyone in here that things are growing spiritually darker. If there ever was a time when America was a Christian nation, that is no longer the case. The culture today often celebrates what God's word condemns. What used to be considered shameful is now glorified. Things that were once considered appalling are now openly paraded. Making matters worse, if someone dares to stand up or speak up for what is right, they are ridiculed and canceled. We all face a tremendous amount of pressure to conform to the ideologies and belief systems of the world. For those of us who are trying our best to live a godly life, this poses a significant challenge. How are you supposed to follow God while living in a godless world? Believe it or not, I think the Old Testament book of Daniel may hold some answers for us. Like us, Daniel and his friends found themselves living in a wicked world, yet somehow, they managed to hold to their convictions and stand strong in their faith. By considering their story, we're going to learn how to remain strong even when we face resistance." Let's get into our lesson...

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. What struck you most from the Pastor Daniel's sermon?
2. Why do you think peer pressure has such a powerful influence on us?
3. Do you think that social media has made the problem worse? How have you seen this play out?

Digging Deeper in God's Word: Life Lessons

READ DANIEL 1:1-7

Parents often worry about the influence of peer pressure on their children. Adolescents do not often have great wisdom, and the desire to fit in and be liked can cause them to make foolish life decisions. With the rise of social media, the pressure to conform has grown even more powerful. Young people are not the only ones influenced by such power; adults are also swayed by the demand to conform to the culture around them as well. We see that same struggle throughout the pages of Scripture. In that struggle, Daniel displayed character that compelled him to take a bold stand in order to remain faithful to God in his culture.

1. Why do you think the king wanted Israelites in his court?
2. Why do you suppose the king gave these specific requirements to Ashpenaz?
3. Put yourself in the place of these young men. What do you think Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were thinking when they were chosen for this process?
4. Why was it important for them to learn Chaldean language and literature?

5. Is it possible for a person to be boldly faithful if he or she avoids culture altogether? Explain. What are some ways Christians today can be part of culture that won't compromise our faith and provide us opportunities to share that faith?

Nebuchadnezzar wanted Daniel and the other Israelites completely immersed in Babylonian culture. He wanted them to worship his gods, read his books, wear his clothing, and eat his food. The quicker he could assimilate them, the less likely it would be for them to rebel against him.

Daniel, along with others were viewed as promising young people, and were taken to Babylon as Israel was defeated and then exiled from their land. The Lord had long warned His people that if they failed to remain faithful to His covenant, this very thing would take place (Lev. 26:33; 39; 2 Kgs. 20; Isa. 39). For generations, God's people walked in disobedience, and now they were feeling the effects of God being true to His word.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ DANIEL 1:8-16

1. What attitude did Daniel display when he refused the king's food? Why is humility important when we are standing against forces of culture that seem opposed to our relationship with God?

When confronted with the prospect of surviving in a foreign and hostile culture, these young men could have accepted any change their rulers placed on them. However, Daniel resisted, taking a position he believed was right regardless of who joined him. Perhaps the meat had been previously offered to an idol, or perhaps he feared that his eating the food would discredit his witness for the Lord. It is also possible that it included non-kosher food, which a faithful Jew would not eat.

2. Why do you think Daniel suggested the 10-day test to the chief official? What purposes did it accomplish?
3. The test not only strengthened the faith of the other exiles and impressed the officials of the king's court, but it also strengthened the resolve of Daniel and his friends. Why do tests of our discipline strengthen our resolve to continue to live God's way?

The result of the trial period showed that the four Hebrews looked better and healthier than all those who ate the king's food. Recognizing he could accommodate Daniel's wishes and remain true to his ruler's orders; the guard replaced the "food and the wine" (v. 16) with "vegetables" (v. 16) and water. This small but significant victory for Daniel and his friends demonstrated that even in this foreign and dangerous place, God was still with them. He blessed their faith and obedience physically and spiritually. When God's people reject certain aspects of their culture, they often can do so privately and without fanfare. They simply make a personal commitment and live according to God's standards, no matter what others do.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ DANIEL 1:17-21.

Not only did God protect the young men physically, but He grew them in wisdom and in skill so they might be promoted by the king. He even gave Daniel understanding of dreams and visions (1:17). This is one of many reminders in the life of Daniel that God's hand was upon His people, even in the midst of their oppression. Even while King Nebuchadnezzar sought to tame the young Hebrews, God strengthened them in body and spirit.

1. How did God reward Daniel's obedience to Him in an environment that was contrary to Daniel's moral, ethical, and religious beliefs?
2. In what ways does Daniel's story relate to our choices in the society where we live?

ENCOUNTER GOD in 2024

3. Read John 17:14-16 and Romans 12:1-2. How does the gospel speak into the tension we feel to live in the world, but not let it hinder our faith?

Just as Daniel handled a difficult challenge to his relationship with God with tact and grace, we too can live above reproach before God and men. We can be confident that God will give us all we need to avoid spiritual compromise and to live a disciplined Christian life.

Applying God's Word

What did you learn from this study and how does this personally speak to you? Discuss with your group.

The stories you will tell tomorrow will be determined by the choices you are making today. What choices do you need to change in order to tell a better story? I want to challenge all of you to pick an area where you are going to begin to honor God. Just like Daniel who, 'purposed in his heart' to honor God in this area, I want you to think about an area where you are going to draw a line in the sand. It doesn't have to be a big thing. It could be a small thing. What matters is your resolve.

1. How does our culture seek to inform our identity? How can we make sure our identity is secure in Christ, even when our faith is tested?
2. How have you struggled to be faithful when tested in the past? How does Daniel's obedience inspire you to be faithful, even in ways that might seem insignificant (like the food he ate)?
3. How can living faithfully before God in small ways provide big opportunities to share the gospel with others?

PRAYER: Take some time in prayer to repent of ways that you have given into the culture around you because it was the easier choice. Ask Him to strengthen your faith and faithfulness, even when this means rejection or opposition from the world.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it." {Prov. 22:6}

What was the Babylonian captivity/exile?

The Babylonian captivity or exile refers to the time period in Israel's history when Jews were taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. It is an important period of biblical history because both the captivity/exile and the return and restoration of the Jewish nation were fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies.

God used [Babylon](#) as His agent of judgment against Israel for their sins of idolatry and rebellion against Him. There were actually several different times during this period (607-586 B.C.) when the Jews were taken captive by Babylon. With each successive rebellion against Babylonian rule, Nebuchadnezzar would lead his armies against Judah until they laid siege to Jerusalem for over a year, killing many people and destroying the Jewish temple, taking captive many thousands of Jews, and leaving Jerusalem in ruins.

As prophesied in Scripture, the Jewish people would be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years of exile. That prophecy was fulfilled in 537 B.C. when King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to Israel and begin rebuilding the city and temple. The return under the direction of Ezra led to a revival among the Jewish people and the rebuilding of the temple.

Under the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar II, the Babylonian Empire spread throughout the Middle East, and around 607 B.C., [King Jehoiakim](#) of Judah was forced into submission, becoming a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar ([2 Kings 24:1](#)). It was during this time that Nebuchadnezzar took many of the finest and brightest young men from each city in Judah captive, including Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego). After three years of serving Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim of Judah rebelled against Babylonian rule and once again turned to Egypt for support. After sending his army to deal with Judah's revolt, Nebuchadnezzar himself left Babylon in 598 B.C. to deal with the problem. Arriving in Jerusalem around March of 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, taking control of the area, looting it, and taking captive with him Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, his family, and almost all of the population of Judah, leaving only the poorest people of the land ([2 Kings 24:8-16](#)).

At that time Nebuchadnezzar appointed [King Zedekiah](#) to rule as his representative over Judah, but after nine years and still not having learned their lesson, Zedekiah led Judah in rebellion against Babylon one final time ([2 Kings 24-25](#)). Influenced by false prophets and ignoring Jeremiah's warnings, Zedekiah decided to join a coalition that was being formed by Edom, Moab, Ammon and Phoenicia in rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar ([Jeremiah 27:1-3](#)). This resulted in Nebuchadnezzar again laying siege to Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell in July 587 or 586 BC, and Zedekiah was taken captive to Babylon after seeing his sons killed before him and then having his eyes plucked out ([2 Kings 25](#)). At this time Jerusalem was laid to waste, the temple destroyed, and all the houses burned. The majority of the Jewish people were taken captive, but, again, Nebuchadnezzar left a remnant of poor people to serve as farmers and vinedressers ([2 Kings 25:12](#)).

The books of 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings deal with much of the time leading up to the falls of both the Northern Kingdom and Judah. They also cover the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah was one of the prophets during the time leading up to the fall of Jerusalem and the exile, and Ezekiel and Daniel were written while the Jews were in exile. Ezra deals with the return of the Jews as

promised over 70 years before by God through the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. The book of Nehemiah also covers the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile was over.

The Babylonian captivity had one very significant impact on the nation of Israel when it returned to the land—it would never again be corrupted by the idolatry and false gods of the surrounding nations. A revival among Jews took place after the return of the Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the temple. We see those accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah as the nation would once again return to the God who had delivered them from their enemies.

Just as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah, God judged the Babylonians for their sins, and the Babylonian Empire fell to the armies of Persia in 539 B.C., once again proving God's promises to be true.

The seventy-year period of the Babylonian captivity is an important part of Israel's history, and Christians should be familiar with it. Like many other Old Testament events, this historical account demonstrates God's faithfulness to His people, His judgment of sin, and the surety of His promises.