

## DANIEL: Welcome to the Jungle

### Daniel 1:1-8<sup>i</sup>

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Good morning, Trinity! For those of you that are guests, we want to say a special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, and I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. And whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are thrilled to have you today. And on behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you today.

We would love the opportunity to connect with you. You can simply text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. You will then be prompted to click on a link that will provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you. And here's our promise to you... we promise not to bombard your inbox. Again, we would love the opportunity to connect with you and to pray for you.

Today we are launching a new sermon series where we are going to spend this spring working through the Old Testament book of Daniel. This is a fascinating book for many reasons. But ultimately, the overarching themes of the book is that God is sovereign, God loves and delivers His people, He uses the faithful, and God is always victorious.

So, I want to invite you to turn with me in your copy of God's Word to the book of Daniel as we begin in chapter 1. Daniel is located between the books of Ezekiel and Hosea. We are going to be in verses 1-8 this morning. The title of this morning's message is, "Welcome to the Jungle." Now, before you all start singing Guns N Roses, let me share with you the reason for that title.

#### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Welcome to the Jungle**

Years ago, Cathy and I went on a mission trip to Brazil. For 10 days we lived on a three-story boat, and we went up and down the Amazon River doing ministry in small villages located on the river.

Now, let me give you some advice if you ever go to the Amazon region of Brazil. Don't watch the movie Anaconda before you go. It will mess you up. I can remember one stop we made on the banks of the river, I noticed some bubbles coming to the surface of the water and I made the mistake of asking

what those bubbles were. The translators we had said they were baby anaconda bubbles. I was like, "Ah nah! Get me out of here!"

But, before we left for the trip, Cathy's dad pulled both of us aside and said, "Listen, you guys are headed to the jungle. There's a lot of stuff in the jungle. Tigers, monkeys, jaguars and things like that. Just remember, Cathy, if anything starts chasing you, just outrun Chris." I was like, "Aah, thanks."

On one occasion, we were leaving a village and headed back to the boat. We were walking a trail in which we were surrounded by heavy jungle on either side. All of a sudden, we heard a bustling in the trees and something jumped out. I just ducked and thought, "Well, Jesus, here I come." It turned out to be a Brazilian that was playing with us. Not funny!!!

It really was a fun trip, and The Lord did some amazing things while we were there. Having been on that trip, I would go again in a heartbeat.

But I can tell you this, I'm out of my comfort zone in the jungle. It is a very foreign place to me. While I enjoyed my time there, it was definitely not home.

As we approach our study of Daniel, that's the same feeling I think Daniel felt. As he was taken into captivity and exiled to a foreign land, I can hear the Babylonians saying, "Welcome to the Jungle!"

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Some background information reading Daniel is important as we begin. The Book is divided into two parts. The first half centers on events surrounding Daniel's life. The second part of the book focuses on prophecies of Daniel. The first part is historical and the second part prophetic. The prophecies can be divided into fulfilled prophecies and unfulfilled prophecies. That's the structure.

The setting of the Book plays out from the very beginning. God started the nation of Israel with the calling of Abraham around 2,000 B.C. God then called Moses to set His people free and led them out of Egypt and into the wilderness. Ultimately, Joshua led them into the promised land. Israel then demands a king and Samuel anoints Saul. That ended badly so God anointed David to the throne. David and Solomon's reign, Solomon being David's son, is considered the golden age of Israel. After Solomon's reign, the Israelite kingdom is divided into two, the northern and southern kingdoms. 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel form

the northern kingdom and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin form the southern kingdom. Jerusalem is located in the southern kingdom. It is also by way of the southern kingdom that Jesus comes, the lion of Judah.

Then, around 722 B.C., the Assyrians attack the northern kingdom and take them into captivity. About 100 years later, in 605 B.C., the Babylonians take the southern kingdom captive.<sup>ii</sup> This is where Daniel begins. So, Let's look at it together. Verses 1-3 of Daniel 1.

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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..."*

Here we are introduced to a few key people and places in this opening. First is king Jehoiakim. He was a terrible king. We learn in reading the other prophets in the Old Testament that he actually burned God's Word. Maybe this is why he only reigned three years. What a horrible three years that must have been.

Then we meet Nebuchadnezzar. He is the king of Babylon. But before he was king, he was a great commander of the Babylonian army. He then rose to kingship and is known as one of the greatest rulers in ancient times.<sup>iii</sup>

We then read about the land of Shinar. The land of Shinar is mentioned 8 times in the Old Testament. It was the location of the Tower of Babel.<sup>iv</sup> It is associated with opposition to God. Where the wickedness of man sought their own glory above God's glory. This is the location where Nebuchadnezzar had the items of Israelite worship brought to reside.

That's the major setting and characters by which the events of Daniel unfold.

Now, when I read this opening in Daniel, I see where this book presents juxtapositions. In at least three categories, we see a comparison between Almighty God and the rule and reign of evil. We see the sovereignty of God juxtaposed to the will of man. We see God's ways versus culture's desires, and then we see resolution compared to compromise. So, that is going to

serve as our outline this morning as we work through the message of the opening verses of Daniel.

### **MESSAGE:**

So, let's first examine...

#### **1) God's Sovereignty versus the Will of Man.**

We see in these first three verses that there are several decisions that are made. Jehoiakim has made some decisions to neglect God's Word. Nebuchadnezzar made a decision to invade Judah. He then made the decision to lay siege to Jerusalem. So, we see in these presentations the will of humanity. The decisions made by humans.

However, it is important to notice the detail in verse 2. Look at it again. <sup>2</sup> **And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand...** So, what someone might say is that this was all Nebuchadnezzar's doing. But this verse tells us that God is at work in and through this situation. That's sovereignty.

This begs the question, "Why would God do such a thing?" Well, God gave the Israelites very clear laws by which they were to conduct themselves and care for the land God had given them. But over the course of time, the people of God distanced themselves from God's Word and felt that they knew the best way in which to live and operate. For 490 years Israel ignored God!

Here's the truth, beloved, choices have consequences. Decisions have consequences. And the consequence for ignoring God in the time of Daniel was that God gave them over to the Babylonians.

This is not the only time this happens in Scripture. Multiple times in the O.T. and also in the N.T. In Romans 1:28, God does the very same thing. Paul says, <sup>28</sup> **And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.** That's the N.T.

What was true in Daniel's day and time, and true in the first century, is also true for us today. Our choices and decisions have consequences. And God will not turn a blind eye. While He is patient, there will come a day of reckoning in which we will be held responsible for our choices.

### **ILLUSTRATION: Fat Greasy Dude**

My childhood Pastor growing up, Bro. Lou Brown, had a saying. I'll never forget it. He would say often, "If you eat fat, greasy food, you'll be a fat, greasy dude." That has forever been etched in my mind.

But it is true, isn't it?! Poor, unhealthy choices always lead to poor, unhealthy consequences. But the converse is true. Good, healthy choices lead to good, healthy consequences. The Israelites are now coming face to face with the consequences from their choice to ignore God and abandon His ways for what they thought was best.

I need to tell you that there is danger in taking that position. There is a warning to us. God says in Hebrews 12:6, "*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*" Just as is the case in Daniel's day, we, too, will be held accountable for our choices.

Now, something else worthy of note here. In just a moment we are going to be introduced to Daniel and his three friends. They are referred to as, "youths." Most scholars believe Daniel and company are 14 or 15 years old at this point.<sup>v</sup>

The item worthy of noting is that these high school aged boys were not the ones that made the decisions for which they will pay. Instead, they are going to spend the rest of their lives reeling from the consequences of the generations ahead of them. And they could take the entitled position and say, "Wait! This isn't my fault!" Or they could recognize the sinful choices made in the past and minister in the midst of the cards in which they were dealt.

Sometimes the consequences we endure are not at our own doing. Most of the time they are. But sometimes we pay the consequences of other people's choices. The nation of Israel suffered the consequences of Jehoiakim's decisions. And not just his, but all those who came before him.

God is the one who rules. And He also rules over and through the will of man. This is what it means to call God sovereign. It is God who gave Nebuchadnezzar victory. It is God, as we will see, that gives Daniel favor. And it is God that will use Daniel for an incredible ministry.

Now, the same is true for us today. God is still on His throne. He continues to rule over and through the will of man. And it is God that is, "*[Searching to and fro throughout the whole earth...]*" for those that are faithful to Him to give them

a ministry to our hurting world. God is still looking for Daniels. God is still using Daniels. This is what it means to call God Sovereign and compare that truth to the will of man.

The second juxtaposition that is presented in our text in Daniel 1 is...

## 2) God's Ways versus Culture's Desires

Read with me verses 4-7. *<sup>4</sup> 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.*<sup>5</sup> *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.* *<sup>6</sup> Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.* *<sup>7</sup> And 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.*

When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, they left Jerusalem as a war-torn city. Ultimately burning the entire city. When that happened, as you can imagine, people died, family and friends were separated, and some were taken as captives. And this is where the battle between God's ways and culture begins.

Among the captives, standouts were identified. These standouts were to be brainwashed, retrained, indoctrinated, and become servants to the king. And Nebuchadnezzar put Ashpenaz, the chief eunuch, in charge of this task.

Now that term, eunuch, is exactly what you fear.<sup>vi</sup> And to make things worse for young Daniel, while there is debate on this, I believe there is strong reason to believe that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were made to be eunuchs as well. It seems to fit the prophecy foretold about this very situation in Isaiah 39.

Beyond that very strong indication, their new Babylonian culture sought to redefine them. In verse 6 we know their given names. But in verse 7, the culture attempted to change their identities. Daniel's name, which means God (Yahweh) is my judge, was changed to Belteshazzar, which means "Bel (false Babylonian god) protect his life." Hananiah's name, which means "The Lord shows grace," was changed to Shadrach, which means "Command of Aku (the

moon god).” Mishael meaning “Who is like God (The Lord God),” was changed to Meshach which means, “Who is as Aku is?” Azariah, whose name means, “The Lord is my help,” was changed to Abednego which means, “Servant of Nebo (another false god).”<sup>vii</sup> The culture attempted to change who they were.

And for three years, these young men were sent to the University of Babylon<sup>viii</sup> in order to obtain a degree in social sciences with a major in cultural studies. And the purpose of this was to strip these young boys of their identity and teach them who the Babylonians wanted them to be. Beloved, this is the same battle we face today between God’s ways and culture’s desires.

Everything Daniel and company faced was placed upon them to force them to conform to the pattern of the culture. Paul urged the believers in Rome not to succumb to the same pressure. In Romans 12:2 he says, *“**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...**”* The idea in this verse is to not be pressed into the mold of the world, but to be transformed by the focus on God’s Word.

Now, I want you to notice something here. There was something that these 4 young men possessed that the culture really wanted. They were found to be strong, wise, smart, and competent. Listen, I think there is this idea that you can’t be these things and be a Christian. For example, it seems as though there is a belief that faith and science are not compatible. But that’s not true! As believers in Jesus Christ, we ought to be the wisest, the most intelligent, and very competent to the world! God created us to be those things. And He desires us to love Him with all of our hearts, but also all of our minds.

Don’t allow culture to define you. If you belong to Jesus, Jesus defines you. He says you are loved. He says you have a purpose. He says you matter! How do I know that? Romans 5:8 says you matter. *“**but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**”* You matter because you were worth dying for.

Now I’m not trying to present to you a self-help, boost your self-esteem, kind of message today. I’m just saying, “Why allow the culture to define you if you have already been defined by God?!” Why listen to any other source than The Holy Spirit of God?!

### ILLUSTRATION: Cultural Examples

Let me share with you a couple of examples of how this battle between God’s ways and culture’s desires flesh out in our day and time. Consider the institution of marriage. God has clearly defined marriage in His Word. It does not matter what I think or anyone else thinks. God is the designer of marriage and therefore He is the definer of marriage.

What about the issues of gender identity? Now, I think it’s important to say here that some people truly struggle in this area. And we should love them. We must be a church that ministers to the broken. But the truth is that God made us male and female. Culture doesn’t get to define what God has defined.

In the words of Forest Gump, “That’s all I got to say ‘bout that.” So, we’ve looked at God’s sovereignty versus the will of man and at God’s ways versus culture’s desires. Now, let’s look at...

### 3) Resolution versus Compromise

Verse 8 of Daniel 1. *“**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.**”*

A couple of things here. First, we will find out that **more than just Daniel made a resolution at this point**. While verse 8 only tells us that Daniel resolved not to defile himself, a cursory reading of the book reveals that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego made the same decision, a resolution.

I want to draw your attention back to verse 6. *“**Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.**”* Among the many taken captive and placed in the training for the king’s service was Daniel and his friends. And in verse 8, the phrase, *“**But Daniel,**”* highlights the fact that Daniel made a resolution when others chose compromise.

I think many times we can often feel like we are the only ones that desire not to compromise when it comes to holding to the Word of God. When we see or read about people all around us compromising historic theological Christianity, it is easy to think that. Many in Israel’s history felt that way. But there was always what was called a remnant, a small group of people that remained solid in their faith despite the departure of culture. That resolved to follow The Lord wholeheartedly when everyone else was compromising. And that will be the case until The Lord comes back.

So why was it that only these 4 made a resolution here and all the other young men taken captive compromised? Well, consider what lead to compromise. 1) Refusal to cooperate could have been taken as an insult to the king, 2) Peer pressure would have been tremendous because everyone was doing it, 3) The food would have been very appealing and tempting, especially to those having traveled a long distance, 4) Their family wasn't around to know that they did. In other words, no one was looking. And 5) it could have hindered their chances at career advancement.<sup>ix</sup>

Listen, these are all still the same reasons people compromise today. And it is a slow fade that is easily justified. So, Daniel made a resolution here.

Secondly, I want you to see the resolution that Daniel made. **He decided to take a stand when it came to the king's food and drink.** Why did he draw the line there?

Well, throughout Israel's history, abiding by the diet laid out in the Mosaic Law was not only important but very difficult. It was especially the case when they were captives in foreign countries.<sup>x</sup> As a result, the reason Daniel drew the line here is that the food from the king's table *violated the Mosaic Law*.

But a second reason why Daniel and company would draw a line at eating this food is because the meat and wine would have *first been offered as a sacrifice to their pagan gods*. To consume it would be participating in idol worship.

Another reason is that Daniel *couldn't control the other things that happened to him, but he could control what he put in his mouth*. So, he drew a line at what was in his purview.

A third thing that I want us to consider regarding the point of resolution versus compromise is **how Daniel went about protesting the food and wine** measure. The second part of verse 8, *"Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself."* Here, Daniel was polite and tactful. He disagreed in agreeable fashion.<sup>xi</sup> This is a key factor, even for us today, in influencing culture without compromise. Jesus said to his disciples, *"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."* This is the same approach Daniel took and is an example of how we should operate today.

Daniel resolved; he drew a line that he would not cross. Here's the question to us today in consideration of this. Where is your line? What are the things that you will not compromise? Living in an ungodly world and culture demands that we draw a line. If we do not, we will compromise. And little compromises lead to massive departures.

### **CONCLUSION:**

As we conclude the opening study here today, I want to invite the band to come back up. As they come I want to mention one other important thing. I know what happens, as soon as the Pastor say in conclusion, everyone checks out. But hang with me for a moment. You're saying, "But we've held with you already." I know. LOL. Thank you!

I think there is a key thing that allowed Daniel to be so daring. One thing that allowed him to remain steadfast in the midst of a culture. God made a promise to Daniel. The promise was that He was going to restore the nation of Israel again. And that truth was strengthened by prophecies given and recorded in this book that we will get to later in the study. And this gave Daniel hope.

It is the same for us today. We have been given a prophecy. The book of Revelation tells us that there is a victory coming! Jesus is coming again. And we are to remain faithful because God will be faithful. The early Church was encouraged by the immanent return of Jesus and we should be as well.

### **CLOSING ILLUSTRATION: Safety Net**

I read an interesting interview this week with a trapeze artist this week in preparing for this study. I want to leave you with a portion of that interview. The interviewer said, "Tell me how you can be so confident the high wire doing all those stunts." The Trapeze artist said, "You know we have a net underneath us as we walk across that high wire. We have it there for two reasons. Number 1, so we don't break our neck. But number two, so we don't fall. If we didn't have the net underneath us we would be so nervous, we would miss, and we would fall. But, as long as that net is there, we can do things that we normally would do."<sup>xii</sup>

The application to us is that we have a safety net. We know that in the end, Jesus wins. We can dare to be bold and dare to be different in a strange culture because of the hope of Christ's return!

[RESPONSE]

## ENDNOTES:

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- <sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation of this sermon: Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, David C Cook Publishing, 2000; Troy Rackliffe, “Daniel 1,” preached at Glade Community Church in Daniels, WV, September 2020; Travis Agnew, “Daniel [Series Overview],” article published on [travisagnew.org](http://travisagnew.org) on August 13, 2020; Mark Driscoll, *Kingdom Down #1: The Spirit of Babylon vs. The Spirit of God*, accessed at: <https://realfaith.com/sermon-series/kingdom-down/> January 5, 2022; Skip Heitzig, “I Dare You: Be Distinct,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, January 6, 2013.
- <sup>ii</sup> Key dates taken from the sermon written by my mentor and friend, Troy Rackliffe.
- <sup>iii</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994, page 56.
- <sup>iv</sup> Information on Shinar found in an article posted on Got Questions. Link to the article can be found here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/land-of-Shinar.html>
- <sup>v</sup> Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994, page 60.
- <sup>vi</sup> Got this little quip from Mark Driscoll.
- <sup>vii</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Resolute: OT Commentary on Daniel*, David C Cook Publishing, 2000, page 21.
- <sup>viii</sup> Funny quip taken from Mark Driscoll.
- <sup>ix</sup> Points taken from Stephen R. Miller, *The New American Commentary: Daniel*, B&H Publishing, Nashville, 1994, page 67.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, page 66.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*, page 67.
- <sup>xii</sup> Illustration found in Skip Heitzig’s message “I Dare You: Be Distinct,” taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque on Sunday, January 6, 2013.