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“Standing Strong in a Wayward World”

Daniel 1 - Part 1

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Our world is constantly trying to squeeze us into its mold. Our faith, our values, and our principles will be regularly challenged by an environment that is often contrary to ours. Daniel was a young man who was thrust into a different culture with different values that conflicted with his relationship with God, but he never wavered in his faith. He knew who he was in the Lord. He lived in Babylon, but he would not allow Babylon to live in him. May the same be true for us in the world in which we live!

### Historical Background

1. The book of Ezekiel and the book of Daniel overlap in a number of ways.
  - a. Ezekiel’s ministry was focused on the Jews deported to Babylon (modern-day Iraq).
  - b. Bible scholars believe it’s unlikely that Daniel and Ezekiel knew each other.
2. Daniel, who was deported nine years before Ezekiel, had King Nebuchadnezzar’s palace as his ministry focus, as well as ministry to succeeding Babylonian kings, and finally, King Cyrus of Persia.
3. Daniel and his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, were part of the first wave of exiles that King Nebuchadnezzar deported to Babylon.
4. The book of Daniel
  - a. The book of Daniel covers about 70 years of history.
  - b. The Babylonian Empire was the dominant world power during most of Daniel’s ministry.
  - c. The king of Babylon at the beginning of Daniel’s ministry was Nebuchadnezzar, which means “Nabu protects the crown.”
  - d. Nabu was a Babylonian god of wisdom.

- e. The Persian Empire was the dominant world power at the end of Daniel's ministry.
- f. Daniel wrote this book near the end of his life, and Bible scholars believe that the year would have been 536 B.C.
  - i. Daniel's name is mentioned nine times in this book.
  - ii. Jesus attributed authorship of this book to Daniel.<sup>1</sup>
- g. This book is known as The Apocalypse of the Old Testament.
  - i. Daniel prophesied about the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek Empire, before they even came into being!
  - ii. Daniel prophesied about the break-up of Alexander the Great's Empire, into four pieces (to be ruled by his four generals), two hundred years before those events unfolded!
  - iii. Daniel predicted the coming of the Messiah to the exact day!
  - iv. Daniel predicted the coming of the Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and the End of the Age.
- h. Daniel was a young man who had tremendous courage and convictions in a very challenging environment.
  - i. Daniel was a man of principles and faith, and his loyalty to God was remarkable to say the least.
  - ii. Bible scholars believe he was about 15 years old at the time he was exiled to Babylon, which was about 900 miles from his homeland.
  - iii. He was uprooted and taken away from his home, his family, and his language, and he was thrust into a pagan foreign culture.
  - iv. The Babylonians' strategy was to absorb exiles into their mind-set, their culture, their values, their language, etc.
  - v. Daniel resisted the temptation to embrace the political and cultural influences of the Babylonians.
    - 1. Pastor Gary said, "[This book] is timeless. Every single one of us will be confronted with an ever-pressing temptation to become just like the culture around us. We will always, as Christ-followers, as Christians, be confronted with the sense of... whose are we? Are we the world's or are we the Lord's? And to whom will we be most loyal? Who defines and shapes us and molds us? Will it be the Lord, or will it be our culture?... This is Daniel's story and it is our story. ... His conviction to always please God outweighed the temptation to fear and please [men]. ... He lived for the glory of God. The truth is that all of us want to be accepted, [and] all of us want to fit in. ... For this reason, it's very easy to get seduced

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<sup>1</sup> [Matthew 24:15](#) - " *So when you see standing in the holy place "the abomination that causes desolation," spoken of through the prophet Daniel..'* "

by the [culture]. ... The [culture] is constantly assaulting us [just] like it [constantly assaulted Daniel]. ... The systematic seduction [renders] us irrelevant for the Kingdom. When Christians end up living like the world and talking like the world and doing everything the world does, [the enemy uses] this as a subtle attack [that makes us] ineffective and irrelevant for the Kingdom. God is always calling men and women and young people to stand [up] for what is right and true and honorable. ... Daniel had a decision to make [and so do we!]"

2. Daniel lived in Babylon, but he never let Babylon live in him.
- vi. The Assyrians treated defeated nations with cruelty almost beyond description, but the Babylonians sought to make it so appealing that exiles would want to remain in Babylon.
  1. Herodotus, an ancient historian, described Babylon in its waning years as being approximately 200 square miles, which is about three times the size of Washington, D.C.
  2. There were more than 60 miles of walls around the city, and the walls were 300 ft. tall and 80 ft. thick.
  3. There were 100 brass gates and 220 towers.
  4. The Euphrates River was diverted around the city as a defensive moat, and it was also diverted under the walls of the city so that it would be a beautiful meandering river.
  5. Rising from the center of the city was a ziggurat that stood 400 ft. tall, and being a terraced structure, it had incredible gardens at each level.
  6. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

#### The Seduction Of Babylon – Physical Isolation

5. The key strategy of the Babylonians was to separate exiles from their home, language, and religion, with the hope being that those same exiles would be more likely to abandon the way they used to live, having been worn down and weakened by the pressure to conform to the values and culture of the Babylonians.
6. Pastor Gary said, “Let me tell you when [this is] tested in modern terms. [It’s] when kids go off to college. [All] of a sudden [kids] are isolated for the first time... [and] they are separated from everything that was familiar up to that point in their lives. They are separated from their family, their support structure... and they are thrust into an environment, that you better believe, is going to shape them into its environment. [When Christian kids go off to college, it’s likely for the first time that their faith and values will be tested.] It will be in those moments that they will realize

who they are or who they aren't. And it will be an opportunity for them to become stronger in their faith, values, and principles, like Daniel, or become more absorbed by the environment... [This is why parents need to lay a] foundation early and repeat it often because at some point every single [person] needs to grow up and own [his or her] faith. ... Someone laid a foundation in Daniel's life! ... Every single one of us who live in the real world, work a real job, go to a real school, [and] live in a real neighborhood, your values, faith, and principles will constantly be assaulted! [The world] is not interested in helping you to grow in your faith in Jesus! ... The world's goal is to put separation between you and the Lord."

7. Pastor Gary said, "It's important for you to stay regular in your own personal Bible study [and prayer time] because if you isolate yourself [away] from the important underpinnings of your faith, then... you will make yourself more vulnerable to the philosophies and values of our culture. ... Let me say this too. Don't deny [these things] in a corporate way. We need the fellowship of one another. ... Being a part of God's family helps us [and] strengthens us to go out into a real world and, hopefully, make a difference in the real world. We need each other!"
8. [Hebrews 10:25](#) - *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* (1984 NIV)

#### The Seduction Of Babylon - Mental Indoctrination

9. [Daniel 1:3-4](#) - *"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, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the **language and literature of the Chaldeans.**"* (Emphasis added)
10. Pastor Gary said, "Education can be a very powerful tool [for good or evil]. So, we have to be very discerning [about recognizing what is education for the advancement of knowledge and what is education with respect to indoctrination]. Look at Nazi Germany [and] Hitler's youth movement of the 1930s. Millions of children and teens were indoctrinated with rewritten history and distorted biology about a superior race. Thousands of teachers throughout Germany joined the Nazi Teachers' Association and [believed and spread the propaganda]."
11. "All propaganda must be so popular and on such an intellectual level, that even the most stupid of those toward whom it is directed will understand it... Through clever and constant application of propaganda, people can be made to see paradise as

hell, and also the other way round, to consider the most wretched sort of life as paradise.” – Adolph Hitler <sup>2</sup>

12. Pastor Gary said, “We have to be wise about different ways that information is being circulated, whether through institutions of higher learning or [media or the Internet]. [No matter the source, information is being disseminated] to convince us about things that are not true as if they were [true]. There’s even social media engineering [meant] to control who sees what, with manipulated feeds, [search results, with sophisticated algorithms [that] tailor what you will be able to see so that they will get you to believe what they want you to believe. We have to sift through all of the Babylonian mindset with a biblical mindset.”
13. Referring to the transgender debate and individuals who are hurting and confused, Pastor Gary said, “The answers that the world is presenting on this topic are quite honestly, intellectually and biological dishonesty. ... For people who are confused about gender identity, it will not ever change DNA, chromosomal makeup that God created you to be, either male or female. It doesn’t matter how many surgeries [a person] has or how [a person] identifies. ... I want people to know the transformation of heart, soul, and mind that happens in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ so that... they can rest in the wonder and beauty of the design [of who God created them to be]. ... I feel the challenge of trying to present [truth] because our culture and our environment is being intellectually and biologically dishonest, and their loud voices are drowning out the truth that you and I believe, that can be liberating to people who need it. ... We have to be involved enough to sift through this stuff and not just accept it because a few scientists or five justices in black robes or really smart people or a majority of people tell [us] what is true.”
14. “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” – Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Reich Minister of Propaganda <sup>3</sup>

#### The Seduction Of Babylon – Identity Alteration

15. **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.”*
  - a. Daniel means “God is my judge.”
  - b. Hananiah means “the Lord is gracious.”
  - c. Mishael means “who is like God?”
  - d. Azariah means “the Lord helps.”
16. The Babylonians tried to strip away who these four young men were by giving them

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<sup>2</sup> <http://libertytree.ca/quotes/Adolf.Hitler.Quote.EE50>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/joseph-goebbels-on-the-quot-big-lie-quot>

new names of pagan gods.

- a. Belteshazzar means “may Bel protect my life.”
- b. Shadrach means “illuminated by the Sun god, Ra.”
- c. Meshach means “who is like Aku.”
- d. Abed-Nego means “a servant of Nebo.”

17. Pastor Gary said, “People have their identities in their [husband or wife or boyfriend or girlfriend or job or title or trophy or ring,] but all of those things will eventually fade or fail you, [but the Lord will never fail you!] That’s why we have to be grounded in who we are in the Christ. ... While things and people fail us and fade away and become irrelevant, Jesus never will.”
18. **Daniel 1:8** - *“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.”*
19. Daniel had personal resolution and the courage of his convictions, and so should we!

#### Discussion Questions

1. Read **Daniel 1:1-8** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Spend time talking about the historical overview of the book of Daniel. (See #1 through #4g above)
3. Spend time discussing the person and character of Daniel. (See #4h above)
4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s comments about the timeliness of learning more about how Daniel lived a godly life in a pagan culture. (See #4h-v above)
5. Read and discuss Pastor Gary’s remarks about the physical isolation strategy of the Babylonians and how young people have a similar experience today. (See #6 above)
6. Read and discuss **Hebrews 10:25**. (See #7 and #8 above)
7. Read and discuss **Daniel 1:3-4**. (See #9 through #12 above)
8. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary’s remarks about the transgender debate. (See #13 and 14 above)

9. Read and discuss [Daniel 1:7-8](#). (See #15 through #19 above)
10. Close your time by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)