



## **Daniel's M.B.A. – Master's of Babylonian Administration**

### **Pilgrim Living in the 21st Century**

Daniel 1

David Sunday

September 4, 2016

---

We're going to look at Daniel's "MBA program"—his Master's of Babylonian Administration. We picked this book for America's election season because it helps us know how to live as exiles, as strangers, as minorities in the culture. The Bible says that is what we are. We are in this world but not of this world. We live here, but we have a heavenly citizenship. God wants us to know that as His people we can thrive in 21st America, just as Daniel and his friends thrived in the sixth century B.C. in Babylon.

It all starts with deeply knowing Who to trust. Our coins and our currency bear this inscription: In God We Trust. We know that for many of our neighbors this is just a slogan. But for those of us who are followers of Jesus this is a challenge. Do we trust in the God of our salvation?

I want to begin with a probing question that I heard from my friend Mike Bullmore that really made me think. He asked, "What would it take for you to abandon your trust in God?" What would it take to cause you to say, "That's it. I'm done. I no longer can trust in God because of what is happening in my life"? Is there anything that could shake your foundation so much that you would find yourself doubting the reality of God's goodness or the faithfulness of God's purposes in your life?

What would it take for you to abandon your trust in God? Would it be a loss of job perhaps, or being evicted from your home? Maybe the betrayal of a great friend, the abandonment of a spouse, the death of a child—or the destruction of our nation? What would it take for you to abandon your trust in God? See, it's easy to say, as Peter said, "Lord, even if everyone else forsakes You, I will never forsake You" (Mark 14:31). But we know that we can easily get thrown off our game, and our faith isn't always as strong as we think it is.

Daniel is here to help us focus on the God Who is worthy of our trust. He's helping us to see that our God is sovereign. Throughout this book, Daniel is going to be saying to us, "Gaze upon your sovereign God. Glance at your circumstances, but gaze on the sovereignty of God. The

more you gaze upon this God Who is all sovereign, you will find there is nothing in Him that would ever betray your trust. He is worthy to be trusted. He is perfectly trustworthy.”

The main claim of Daniel 1—a theme we’re going to trace throughout this narrative—is this: even when it seems God is doing nothing, we can always trust that our God is doing something good in our lives. We’ll start in Daniel 1:1-2 with the setting of this narrative, then move in verses 3-7 to the conflict that develops, which results in a climax in verses 8-16, and then finally there is a resolution in verses 17-21. The story is teaching us that even when it seems He’s doing nothing, we can always trust that our God is up to something good in the lives of His people.

### **The Setting**

In the setting in verses one and two, Daniel introduces us to God’s invisible sovereignty:

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 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.*

This siege of Nebuchadnezzar is Phase One of a process that’s going to end with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. We see that Nebuchadnezzar subjugates the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, and signifies his defeat of God’s people by taking the holy vessels from the treasury of God’s house in Jerusalem, carrying them off to Babylon, and putting them in the temple of a pagan god.

It looks like Nebuchadnezzar is all-powerful—and he thinks he is. He’s going to act like a man who is drunk on his own power. In fact, in chapter four we’re going to find King Nebuchadnezzar walking out onto the roof of his royal palace in Babylon, looking out at all that is before him, and saying, “*Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as the royal residence for the glory of my majesty?*” It’s going to take a painful lesson of humiliation for Nebuchadnezzar to learn Who is really in control.

But Daniel knows from the beginning of this narrative, and he wants us to know—in the words of Larry Osborne—“Who is in control of who is in control.” God is the Lord Almighty, sovereign over heaven and earth. He is in control of all the kings of this earth. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Daniel believes this and he wants us to see this at the very beginning of

the story, because seeing this is what gives Daniel the courage and confidence to live so faithfully in Babylon.

Do you see how Daniel indicates that God is sovereign in verse two? *“The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.”* God’s people aren’t in Babylon by accident. They’re there by God’s sovereign design. Their eviction from the land of promise and their exile in a foreign land is all a sign of God’s faithfulness to His word. This isn’t an accident.

You might remember the story of King Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kings 20). He’s that king who got really sick and prayed that God would heal him. God gave him 15 more years of life, but it would have been better if Hezekiah had died a little younger. In the last 15 years he failed to trust wholly in God. When the king of Babylon heard that Hezekiah had been healed, he sent some envoys from Babylon with a “Glad you’re well” present to King Hezekiah.

When they gave King Hezekiah this present from Babylon, Isaiah 39:2 tells us that King Hezekiah welcomed them gladly—and showed them his treasure house. They saw the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oils, his whole armory—all that was found in the storehouse. He showed it all to them. He was pretty proud of himself, and he was also trying to curry favor with the Babylonians because they had a common enemy in the Assyrians. He wanted the Babylonians to help him fight the Assyrians.

Isaiah the prophet said to Hezekiah, “This was not a good idea, Hezekiah. It was not good to trust in the Babylonians.” Look at what he says in Isaiah 39:6-7:

*Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.*

That’s the story of Daniel right there. Daniel wants us to understand that this exile—even though it’s a bad thing and it’s painful—this is God’s plan. God gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.

We mustn’t minimize the pain in our minds. Back in May I was in Poltava, Ukraine, and I had the opportunity to do something I don’t think I’ve ever done before in my life. I met some exiles, some refugees—face to face. You could see in their faces some of what they had gone through, as they were forced to leave behind all they knew—some of them in one day, as the Russians came to take over their towns. One elderly lady in her 70s told me, trembling, how she

had seen right before her eyes three people blown up by a Russian missile. That's just in recent history.

It's a harrowing thing to be taken out of your homeland, to be taken captive as an exile. Real lives were being obliterated. Families were being torn apart. Psalm 137 poignantly describes what these people were going through:

*By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept,  
when we remembered Zion.  
On the willows there  
we hung up our lyres.  
For there our captors  
required of us songs,  
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,  
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

But God's people respond, "*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?*" Daniel says, "I'm going to answer that plaintive cry. I'm going to teach you how to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land." And it all begins with knowing Whom to trust, remembering that "God is in control of who is in control." His sovereignty might be invisible, but even when it seems like He's doing nothing, we can trust He's up to something good. Even when He disciplines His people, God does not abandon His people. "When you see that and trust that," Daniel says, "you can sing the Lord's song in a foreign land."

## **The Conflict**

Moving now to the conflict in verses three through seven, Sinclair Ferguson calls this section "Babylon's brainwash."

*<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, <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.*

Nebuchadnezzar had a strategy. He wanted to get some of the best and brightest minds, some of the strongest youth, of Judah and reprogram their minds. This strategy involved indoctrination: *“Teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”* It was a different worldview.

**Cultural Indoctrination.** This three-year curriculum would have involved studying the Sumerian, Acadian and Aramaic languages. They would have read all the extensive literature written in these languages. Commentators say this would have included different mythological texts. They would study the history of these cultures, as well as astronomy, mathematics and medicine. The Babylonians also had all kinds of astrological omens that these young men would have been required to study. It would have been a demanding, even overwhelming, curriculum—all with a single goal: to erase the Hebrew Scriptures from their memory and to reprogram their minds according to the literature and lore of the Babylonians.

**Appeasement Indoctrination.** But the king also tried to pamper them with luxuries. They say it's easier to catch flies with honey than with vinegar. He attempted to appease them by softening and pampering them with life's finer pleasures. We read in verse five that the king assigned them a daily portion of the food he ate and the wine he drank. Once you start eating like a king, you never want to go back to rice and beans. Once you've been to Bien Trucha, Taco Bell doesn't taste so great anymore. You develop refined tastes and start to feel dependent on the one who's providing these nice luxuries for you.

**False Identity Indoctrination.** There's something more sinister that the king does in this strategy to reprogram the minds of these young men, and it's called identity theft. Did you see that? When they came to Babylon, he says, “You can't be called Daniel,” which means ‘God is my Judge,’ “or Hananiah,” which means ‘the Lord is gracious,’ “or Mishael,” which means ‘who is like God?’ “or Azariah,” which means ‘the Lord is a helper.’ “No, you will be called new names that will remind you of Babylonian gods, so you will seek their aid in your lives. Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will be your new identities.”

Dostoevsky, in The Brothers Karamazov, said, “If God does not exist, then everything is permissible.” And that's what Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do here. He is engaging in an aggressive policy of social engineering to erase anything that reminds them of God, to wipe out any trace of their old faith and their identification with the God of Israel, so they forget to Whom they belong. Because if Nebuchadnezzar can make them forget their identity, anything is permissible. He can control them so easily.

We're in spiritual warfare today, and our enemy uses the same old strategy: indoctrination. He's trying to squeeze us into the world's mold of thinking, to erase God from our thoughts, pampering us and softening our resistance with luxuries that are just so nice! He attempts to rob our identity as followers of Jesus and to confuse us about who we are and Whose we are.

But if we're going to be faithful in this conflict, we have to learn to be vigilant. What does the Bible say we have to do? We have to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). That's an active battle. We have to be praying continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). "Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart." As we read the language, literature and lore of our culture, we have to be reading it all through the lens of God's Word, which is "a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths" (Psalm 119:105).

As we sit down to eat at our tables, we need to remember, "God, it is You Who has given me this day my daily bread. My supply comes from You, and all that I have is from You and through You." We need to remember daily, "I am no longer my own. I've been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 7:23). I've been crucified with Christ; therefore, I no longer live. The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God Who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20). This is my identity now. I belong to Jesus." This is an active battle we face every day.

How did Daniel do it? What was it like for him to say goodbye to his mom and dad, to see the tears in their eyes? He's was dragged off to Babylon. Was he thinking about Jeremiah's words, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11)? Was he thinking about that as he faced such a shocking transition in his life? How did Daniel know he could trust in his sovereign God even when it looked like God was doing nothing? How did Daniel know God was up to something good?

## **The Climax**

It was because Daniel relied on the word that had been spoken through the prophets before him. That's what gave him the strength and resolve described in the next nine verses—the climax of the narrative: Daniel's resistance.

*<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the*

*eunuchs, <sup>10</sup> and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king."*

*<sup>11</sup> Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." <sup>14</sup> So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. <sup>15</sup> At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. <sup>16</sup> So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.*

Before we focus on what Daniel and his friends did to resist the social engineering of Nebuchadnezzar, let's notice what they did not do. They did not refuse to read the literature and learn the language of the Chaldeans. They did not say, "We're burning those books." They did not insult the Babylonians about their culture. They did not complain. They did not stage a protest. They were not rude or obnoxious. They did not try to isolate themselves from the world around them.

Isn't that a good reminder to us? God is not calling us to withdraw from society. We cannot be salt and light for Jesus in the world if we isolate ourselves in our safe little circles. Christians aren't supposed to be with Christians and in church all the time, avoiding the language, the literature, the arts, the athletics and the culture around us—even the politics. We are to be engaged.

Daniel and his friends accepted that Babylon was the place where God had appointed them to live. They took to heart Jeremiah's words in Jeremiah 29:7. "We're going to settle here, and we're going to be a blessing here in this city. We're going to work for the welfare of this administration." Notice how respectful Daniel was to the chief of the eunuchs. He didn't want to get this guy into trouble or make him lose his job—or worse, his head. Daniel doesn't demand his way. He proposes a test. He's humble and respectful in how he does it.

Did you see in verse nine, "*God gave Daniel favor and compassion*" with this official? It's a wonderful indication that even though God's people are coming under God's discipline, they are still God's people. God will not forsake His heritage. God will not abandon His own. He gives

favor to His people. And because Daniel trusts in this sovereign God, he doesn't need to act rudely or angrily or fearfully. He doesn't panic. He doesn't pout. He doesn't protest.

But there are two things we notice that Daniel does do in resistance to Nebuchadnezzar's assimilation policy. First, Daniel remembers his real identity. We see that in verse 11. He doesn't say to the king and his officials, "Sorry. You can't call me Belteshazzar. That's not my name." But he doesn't let go of his Hebrew name either. Verse 11, when he's writing, he says, "We're still Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. I know who I am, and I know Whose I am. I belong to God. He is my Judge, not Nebuchadnezzar." Daniel has not forgotten Who owns him and to Whom his ultimate loyalty belongs.

Secondly, Daniel knows where to draw the line. If you were plotting this narrative on a chart, the high point—the climax, the peak—would be verse eight: "*But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food. or with the wine that he drank.*" Up until now, every action has been upon Daniel. Daniel has been taken away to Nebuchadnezzar's palace. Daniel has been put into this school, the "MBA program." Daniel has had to submit to all these things.

But here Daniel takes action. He has a firm purpose. He understands that his character is being forged here in the choices he makes, and if he allows himself to be compromised at this stage, he will be fully assimilated into the Babylonian culture, and he won't look any different from everyone around him. So he resolves not to defile himself with the food and drink from the king's table.

It's not uncommon when young people go to college that they'll complain about the food that's offered in the campus cafeteria. But that's not the problem here. This is the best food around—the king's food, the finest of fare. What's the problem? No one can say for sure what would have been defiling about this. Sometimes we assume that this food would have violated the Old Testament kosher laws. There may be some truth in that. But if you look at Daniel 10:3, it seems clear that Daniel did occasionally eat finer food and drink wine later on in his life.

So then, people wonder, is this food that possibly was offered to idols? But if that was the case, then the vegetables were probably offered to idols as well—or at least could have been. It could also be that Daniel was refusing to feast on gourmet foods when his fellow Hebrews in Babylon were just scraping by as slaves and exiles. Perhaps he wanted to maintain a solidarity with God's people. We don't know for sure what it was about the diet that Daniel says would have been defiling.

But what we can say for sure is this: Daniel knew without a doubt that if he were to feast on that food, prescribed by the king, he would have become dependent on King Nebuchadnezzar instead of on his God. So Daniel says, “I’m only going to eat a simple diet of what is produced from the earth and drink water, to show that I am completely dependent on God to meet my needs—not on King Nebuchadnezzar.”

And God honored their resolve according to verse 15: “*At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king’s food.*” Now, that’s unusual. Isn’t there a book out there called The Daniel Plan about following Daniel’s diet to lose weight? But Daniel—just eating vegetables and drinking water—ends up fatter and stronger. How does that happen?

God granted him favor. God honored Daniel’s resolve. We too, like Daniel in verse eight, are going to have to make decisive choices not to be defiled by this world. A lot of these choices are very clearly spelled out for us in the commandments of Scriptures. They’re black and white. It’s clear. Yet sometimes dedication to the Lord Jesus will require us to make choices that other believers are free to choose differently. In 1 Peter 3:15 we are called to honor Christ and set Him apart in our hearts as holy, and to live our lives in such a way that, “Thou and Thou only are first in my heart. High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art. I will follow You” (from *Be Thou My Vision* by Dallan Forgaill).

There’s an old tract by a man named George Watson that describes this life. He uses this phrase: “Others may, you cannot.” I encourage you to look it up on Google. It’s very moving. “Others May, You Cannot.” He says:

If God has called you to really be like Jesus, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put upon you such demands of obedience that you will not be able to follow other people or measure yourself by other Christians. And in many ways, He will seem to let other good people do things which He will not let you do....

Settle it forever, then, that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit, and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that He does not seem to use with others. Now when you are so possessed with the living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, you will have found the vestibule of Heaven.

Others may. You cannot. What do you need to resolve to do so that you will not be defiled by this world? There's something. There are a lot of clear things in Scripture, and there may be something God is impressing on your conscience, saying, "That's got to go, in order that you may live faithfully before Me."

## The Resolution

Finally, let's read the resolution in verses 17-21:

*<sup>17</sup> As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. <sup>18</sup> At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. <sup>20</sup> And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. <sup>21</sup> And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.*

Wow! Trust in the sovereignty of our merciful God. He cares and watches over and prospers and blesses His people wherever He places them. Back in 1 Kings 8:50, Solomon prayed when he dedicated the temple, "God, when Your people are carried off into exile for their sins, would You cause their captors to be compassionate and merciful to them." And here Daniel's favor before Nebuchadnezzar and his officials is a direct answer to Solomon's prayer. God gave them learning and skill and understanding. God made them ten times better in wisdom and understanding.

And God preserved Daniel. Even when it seemed like God was doing nothing, God was doing something good in Daniel's life, and He would continue to do that all through his life. Verse 21 is powerful: "*Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.*" Who is he? He's the Medo-Persian king who decreed that the people of Israel, after 70 years of exile, could go back to the Promised Land.

This means that Daniel was in Babylon his whole life—for all 70 years of exile. He was about 20 in chapter one; he's around 90 now when King Cyrus issues that decree. He will also see Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom perish. He will see Darius and his kingdom perish. He will see the Medo-Persians rise to power under King Cyrus. Earthly kingdoms will rise and fall; God's people will outlast them all.

Does that make you a little less nervous about the Democrats and Republicans this November? Does that give you peace? How should I conclude this message? Should I urge you with these lyrics by Philip P. Bliss: “Dare to be a Daniel. Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm. Dare to make it known”? In one sense, yes. What a great example we have here of trust in a sovereign God.

But Daniel didn't stand alone, did he? He had some very great friends standing with him, and we need friends too. We need fellowship to be strengthened. Daniel knew most of all that God Himself was with him. The same God Who delivered King Jehoiakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar was with Daniel and his friends, granting them favor with their captors, giving them physical strength, intellectual understanding and wisdom, and supernatural vision. I don't think Daniel would tell us, “Dare to be like me.” But he would say, “Do not abandon your trust in my God, for my God is your God too. Trust Him.”

If we're honest, we know that far too often we have abandoned our trust in Daniel's faithful God. We've stopped trusting God in far less difficulties than Daniel had. We've defiled ourselves in this world over and over again. We've not only tasted Babylon's fare, we've gorged ourselves on it. We've gotten drunk on the delicacies of this world. We've faltered and wavered and sometimes utterly forsaken our Lord.

But God has never forsaken us, has He? Even when we've been faithless, He has remained faithful—because He cannot deny Himself. Why is that? It's because we have a Savior Who has never been defiled, but Who took our defilement to the cross and bore our sins so that we could be cleansed and made holy in His sight. And because Jesus lives forever, His priesthood lasts forever. Therefore, Scripture says, He is able once and forever to save those who come to God through Him. He lives forever to intercede with God on our behalf. He is the kind of High Priest we need, because He is holy and blameless, undefiled by sin. He has been set apart from sinners, and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven.

What can we say to that? “O praise Him, alleluia! My delight, my reward...” is not in my own faithfulness, but in a Savior Who, when I am faithless, remains faithful. All glory be to His holy name. Amen.

---

## New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

Text provided by [sermontranscribers.net](http://sermontranscribers.net) ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.net](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.net)