

## **“Daniel: Living in Babylon” series**

Week 2: To make a difference, be different

March 15, 2026

*Daniel 1:8 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 favor 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.*

### **Introduction**

- Last week we began a new teaching series based on the book of Daniel. We are calling it “Living in Babylon.”
- It is an account of how Daniel and some friends lived for God and made a difference in their world while living in a country that had a value system and moral center that was not only different from theirs, but in many ways, completely contrary.
- As we mentioned last week, Daniel is one of the only books in the OT not entirely written in Hebrew. The opening and closing are Hebrew, showing the primary audience was Jewish people, but the narrative part, the part we are going to examine, is written in Aramaic, the language of Babylon.
- It is a powerful story and for followers of Jesus later, the idea of living in an anti-God culture became identified as “living in Babylon.”
- 600 years after Daniel, Peter, when writing to the early church, actually used imagery from Daniel to show how we can live faithfully, like Daniel did.

*5:13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.*

- Peter saw the church in the Roman world as living in a Babylon, and in many ways today, we are living in a Babylon that does not acknowledge Jesus as king.
- Daniel teaches us that the struggle is not to make the culture Christian, but how a Christian can live in a hostile culture.
- As we learn from the book of Daniel, what is important to remember is that like every other book in the Bible, the primary purpose of Daniel is not to tell us how to behave. It is to point us to God and who he is and how he interacts with us.
- The focus of the book is God, and it is in our interactions with God that then changes how we behave.

- To bring us up to speed, Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian empire, had conquered the Israelite kingdom and as part of his efforts to subjugate them, had taken the best and brightest into captivity.
- He carried them to Babylon and then sought to indoctrinate them into the life and religion of the Babylonians. His goal was to so assimilate them into the language, life and religion of Babylon that they would seamlessly fit in with the goals and lifestyle of their culture.
- Daniel knew this. He knew that this was the goal. Yet he also knew that he different than the culture he had been taken into. He also resolved that some of those differences were so important that he would not be changed to be like Babylon. This came out in his actions and it led to him make a remarkable difference in the Babylonian kingdom. That's the principle I want to explore this morning.
- **If we want to make a difference, we have to be different.**

## Main Sermon Text

- Daniel and his friends are in the school of Babylon. They are learning the language, being educated in the ways of Babylon. They were being given amazing opportunities to study things and have an education that they probably would not have had if they had stayed in Israel. But since this was about assimilation as much as education, it bumped up against their beliefs and there was a problem.

*Daniel 1:8 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.*

- Daniel drew a line in the sand. He was not going to eat the same diet as all of the others in the program. Have you ever wondered why did Daniel chose to make diet as the moral and theological line over which he refused to step?
- After all, he didn't appear to object over his new Babylonian name, which was after a Babylonian god. He took all the classes including religion. We don't know for sure, but there are several possibilities.
- It could have been the dietary laws set down by God, which prohibited certain foods. This is probably a big part of it, but it must be more than this, because some of what he would not eat was not prohibited in the law.
- Perhaps it was the religious overtones of the food from the king's table. Maybe he was troubled by eating food offered to idols. Except that there is no reason not to think vegetables were exempt from the religious prescriptions of the day.
- It could have been political. By refusing the food, Daniel refused the "relationship" to the king and his lordship – but again, it's probably not this he only rejected "some" of the king's food and later in his life, we read that he did not necessarily keep to these same dietary restrictions (10:3)
- In all likelihood, it is a combination of these. But there was an underlying reason behind all of it. Daniel and his friends knew that God was the one in control. They knew that if they prospered in this new Babylon, it was because God did it, not because of the Babylonian system.
- The word defile means to stain, to pollute. It was like they were saying that if we partake of the food like everyone else, it makes us like everyone else. And we are not. God is the one who is responsible for the outcome of our lives. We choose to put Yahweh front and center.
- So they proposed an experiment.

*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."*

- Treat us differently. Watch what happens.

- Implied in this test is that Daniel and his friends had confidence that God would make a difference in them such that it would be seen and noticed by others. And it worked.  
*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.*
- It wasn't just their appearance, but God blessed their education.  
*17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. . . 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.*
- They were set to make a difference in the culture they lived. God was going to use them to impact an entire nation not their own.
- They were different to make a difference.
- **If we want to make a difference, we have to be different.**
- The question we have to answer, is that if we are going to make a difference in our culture, right here, in 2026 in Delaware, in what ways are we to be different? Let me give you three ways we are to be different that I see in this account.

## I. We are different when God's reputation is our primary concern.

- What's curious about what Daniel did was that his "protest" was done quietly. He did not stage a protest. He didn't stop doing his other work.
- He went to the person in charge to see if they would agree to change their diet. If you've ever had to prepare food for a picky eater, you know how annoying it can be to make something separate and different for them. In this case, they are essentially prisoners asking for different food from the person in charge of them.
- In making his stand, Daniel was strategic, friendly, amiable, open to change. He proposed a test which helped out the very person whose life he was making difficult.
- In this and all future actions, Daniel's goal was the glorification of God's name. What was so helpful for us is that he did not do this by preaching but through how he lived differently.
- These are actually the marching orders given to us by Jesus before he left this earth.
- After he had risen from the dead, they asked him about this.  
*Acts 1:6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*
- They wanted to know Jesus' political agenda – how he was going to move forward and how they were going to march at his side. His answer was totally unexpected.  
*7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*
- How governments change is not your primary concern. Instead, your number one priority is to be my witnesses. I am going to empower you through the Holy Spirit to do this.
- To be his witness is to testify through words and actions to the nature of who Jesus is.
- Our primary job is to show other people what Jesus is like before they ever know him themselves.
- This so changed his followers that Peter, much later in life, told followers of Jesus to:  
*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.*
- Our primary concern is showing that our King is holy, different, and superior to the Nebuchadnezzars of this world in all their ways.
- This means that how you act every day testifies to Jesus. Are you cutting corners? Breaking the law, even in spirit? Are you working hard with integrity? Doing what is right?

- This means that what we say testifies to Jesus. Do you complain a lot? Are you negative? Do you gossip or criticize others? Or do you encourage, speak truth, and be caring?
- Everything you do and say each day is a witness to others.
- Jesus' reputation enhanced or tarnished our words and actions daily.
- Understand that for Daniel, when Nebuchadnezzar found that they were superior in their knowledge and skills and work ethic, he did not chalk it up to God. Not initially. But Daniel knew whose reputation mattered. And it eventually came out.
- We are different when Jesus' reputation is our primary concern. This is because:

## **II. We are different when we live according to kingdom values.**

*8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine*

- Remember that the goal of the Babylonian assimilation program was not just education, but to have them subscribe to the values and morals and social mores of Babylon.
- Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not subscribe to the value of Babylon. What mattered in their lives was different.
- We are not simply following a different rule book. We live differently because of who God is and what he has done for us.
- The values, basically what was most important, of the Israelites were to be different from the world around them
- Jesus, when he came, spent three years teaching his followers that the values of God's kingdom are different than the world in which we live.
- Augustine of Hippo, and early church leader, summarize this idea by saying that within the Babylon we live in, Christian's values are most different in three areas.
- Money – our world approaches money from the standpoint of acquisition. Get all you can. Keep all you can. Spend it mostly on yourself. You might give a little away to feel or look good, money is all about self.
- Power – is something to be gathered and leveraged for self-benefit. You might share a little to get some good marks for diversity or inclusion, but power is about self-promotion.
- Sex – Babylon approaches this like it is all about me. I write my own rules and if it works for me, it is not wrong.
- Consider the kingdom values of Jesus followers.
- Money – is a resource given to us by God to bless others and our communities. We look to steward it well to give it away and use it for others.
- Power – same thing, power is a blessing given by God to be leveraged for the benefit and blessing of others. Our positions and influence are to lift others up, not ourselves.
- Sex – we see God as the author of life and sex as a gift to be used for his purposes. It is an incredible source of life and joy when used within God's definition of relationships and marriage.
- *“The early church was strikingly different from the culture around it in this way – the pagan society was stingy with its money and promiscuous with its body. A pagan gave nobody their money and practically gave everybody their body. And the Christians came along and gave practically nobody their body and they gave practically everyone their money.”* (Tim Keller)
- When we live according to the values of God's kingdom, we will be different.
- We will be different when we make Jesus' reputation our primary concern because we value kingdom values. And why is this?

## **III. We are different when we refuse to compromise.**

- I began the service with that description of our belief system. Let's be honest, when you look at it from the outside, it sees a little . . . crazy.

- Can you imagine how odd it was for the steward when Daniel and his friends told him they weren't allowed to eat what everyone else ate – and it was probably good food.
- 8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine*
- Daniel “resolved.” He was not going to compromise.
  - You see, it would be easy to compromise. They were away from home. God wasn't keeping his side of the equation. We want to fit in so we can influence others.
  - But compromise is deadly.
  - When we compromise what we believe, it might allow us to be accepted in the moment, but compromise robs you of God's power.
  - God prospers and preserves his people ONLY when they submit to him in everything.
  - If you are 90 percent surrendered to Jesus' lordship, you are still 100 percent in charge, because YOU get to decide which 90 percent belongs to him and which 10 percent you keep for yourself.
  - When we compromise the teachings of Jesus, we are retaining control.
  - The direct laws of God are non-negotiable.
  - God is the creator of all things. He is the author of life. People are created in his image which means all life has value. We protect and speak out for life.
  - God designed gender and marriage between man and woman. To go against this is damaging. We cannot compromise.
  - There is only one God. Jesus is the only path to salvation. We don't soft-pedal this.
  - Compromise is what destroys our witness. Compromise is what will destroy the church. But let me give a word of clarification.
  - *“We can never disobey the direct laws of God or condone others doing so. But we shouldn't let secondary convictions or preferences get in the way of others hearing the gospel.”* (J.D. Grear. Everyday Revolutionary)
  - As one pastor said, *“I might be wrong about global warming, but I'm not wrong about the gospel, and I refuse to let my opinions on the former keep people from hearing me out on the latter.”*
  - What we believe is fundamentally different from our world. It is not about doing whatever makes me happy. Not every path is the right path. Selfishness is not a path to fulfillment. There is an eternity at stake.
  - We believe differently and we do not compromise on the good news of Jesus.

## Conclusion

- Peter describes how all three of these things work together.
- 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*
- Followers of Jesus believe differently than Babylon. These beliefs are anchored in the character of God and do not change with culture. This causes us to value the things of this world differently than everyone else, and this affects what we do and how we behave. But because Jesus' reputation is our primary concern, we will live these out with grace and love, never antagonistically, trying to badger and force others to believe or do what we believe or do.
  - We want to live in ways that provoke a question. Live in ways so that others cannot ignore you, mute you or turn you down.
  - How we love, grieve, give, serve, forgive and proclaim should invite questions about what could possibly motivate us.

- **If we want to make a difference, we have to be different.**
- We read a remarkable statement at the end of this chapter that shows how being different leads to us making a difference.

*17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning . . . 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.*

- We see this same phrase repeated three times in this chapter. “God gave.
- God gave Jehoakim into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar
- God caused the official to show favor.
- God gave knowledge and understanding.
- God is the one who make the difference.
- The author then tells us that Daniel remained there until King Cyrus.
- This might not mean anything to you, but the time period he is talking about here is 50+ years. It means that the rest of the book shows how Daniel made a difference in three successive kingdoms, for more than half a century.
- **If we want to make a difference, we have to be different.**
- We must refuse to compromise what God has given us. Are there areas where you find yourself prone to compromise?
- We must make our decisions daily based on the values of God’s kingdom. What values guide your daily decisions?
- We must make every action a witness to the character of Jesus. How are your actions reflecting the character of Jesus.
- When we do these things, God will make a difference through us.