

THRIVING IN EXILE

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

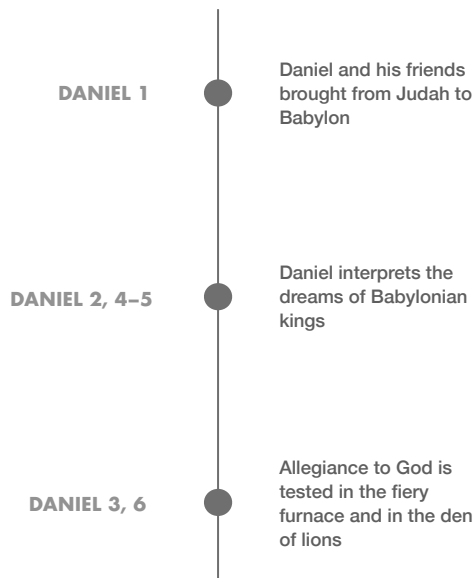
Following Jesus in today's culture is hard. Every day we encounter circumstances that challenge our allegiance to Jesus. From our workplaces to the weekend, from politics to our most personal relationships, the culture tells us to live one way while God calls His people to live distinctly another way.

This creates a tension for followers of Jesus. **How can we remain loyal to our God while living in a culture that is anything but?** Like us, Daniel found himself in a similar tension. Daniel was an

exile. Taken from his home country of Judah to serve the king of the mighty Babylonian Empire, Daniel was faced with a difficult question. Would he continue to give ultimate allegiance to his God in a culture that demanded allegiance to it? Despite every opportunity to shift allegiance to the culture around him, Daniel remained faithful to his God. The book of Daniel is not just an ancient story; instead, Daniel is a timeless account that gives you and me wisdom for thriving in exile today.

THE BIG PICTURE OF DANIEL

CH 1-6 WISDOM FOR TODAY



CH 7-12 HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



**DANIEL WAS AN ISRAELITE WHO REMAINED
FAITHFUL TO HIS GOD IN EXILE.**

DAN 1:1-7

If you grew up going to Sunday school, you've probably heard of Daniel and how he survived being thrown into a lions' den. You may have even heard about Daniel's three friends: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and how they were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship the Babylonian king. While the stories of Daniel are popular in the Sunday school classroom, don't be fooled—there's way more to the life of Daniel than what meets the eye. The book of Daniel is not a mere children's story. Daniel has taught generations of faithful followers of Jesus after him what it looks like to walk faithfully with God in a culture that does anything but.

Daniel was an Israelite, a devout Jew who lived in the land of Judah around 600BC. But he didn't get to live in his home long. When Daniel was a young man, his city was besieged by the mighty Babylonians. Along with other young Jewish men, Daniel was exiled, or taken, from Judah to serve in the royal courts of Babylon. The book of Daniel is an account of his experiences serving as a government official in the royal courts of the greatest empire in the ancient world. As a follower of God living in a pagan empire, Daniel would be faced with decisions that constantly tested his allegiance to his God. As you read the book of Daniel, you will quickly see that few biblical figures have the kind of status Daniel does. Daniel stands as one of the only major figures in the Bible who is portrayed as having no real, moral failures. (For example, Abraham lacked faith, Moses disobeyed God, and King David had an adulterous affair.) While Daniel was no doubt still an imperfect human, he was nevertheless faithful in the face of trial. Surely we can learn from Daniel's life of faithfulness in exile.

GOD'S PEOPLE WERE TAKEN FROM THEIR HOMES IN
JUDAH TO LIVE AS EXILES IN BABYLON.

2 KIN 25:1-21

2 CHRON 36:1-21

The Bible was written for us, but not necessarily to us. Before reading any book of the Bible, it helps to know who the book was written to and why the book was written in the first place. This helps us understand what we're reading and drill down to the author's original, intended message of the book. The book of Daniel was written in a dark and troubled era of Israel's history—the era of the Babylonian Exile. To be exiled is to be in a state or period of forced absence from ones country or home. Israel's 70-year period of exile began in 605BC, when King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. Two more times, in 597BC and 586BC, Babylon invaded Jerusalem and deported Jewish men, women, and children from their homes to Babylon. Jerusalem was devoted to destruction in 586BC.

Imagine a foreign nation overtaking your city, burning to the ground your place of worship, tearing your family apart, and forcing you to move to their country and become like one of them. It's hard to fathom. Everything that was once familiar in your world is no more. Living in a foreign land, your soul aches for home. If we can step into that mindset, we can begin to understand the circumstances surrounding the book of Daniel. With the mindset of an exile, we can read the book how it was meant to be read. Daniel speaks to a people devastated by the destruction of their identity as God's people. Their land—distant. Their king—conquered. Their temple—destroyed. How are God's people supposed to hold onto hope when their situation is hopeless? How can God's people thrive in their faithfulness to God while living in exile? This is the central question of Daniel.

BABYLON WAS THE GREAT CITY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD AND CAME TO REPRESENT ALL THAT WAS EVIL IN THE BIBLICAL STORY.

DAN 4:1-37

From London to Dubai to New York City, these are a few of the world's great cities. The ancient world also had their great cities—the greatest of them being Babylon. Located in southern Mesopotamia, about 60 miles southwest of modern Baghdad, Babylon's city center was built on the banks of the Euphrates River. Under the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became established as the greatest, most lavish city the ancient world had ever seen. The walls surrounding Babylon were large enough to house over 100 fortified gates of bronze for entry into the city. Atop the walls was a highway system that ran the circumference of the city. When Daniel and his friends were exiled, they were appointed to serve in the royal courts of Babylon.

Babylon was not only renowned in the ancient world for its wealth, but was also important to the theological message of the Bible. Mention of Babylon lurks in the shadows of the entire biblical story, from Genesis to Revelation. Some sections of your Old Testament will even make Babylon the main setting of their narrative or the main point of their message (i.e. the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and much of the material in the Prophets: Isaiah–Malachi). Read just about any passage in the Bible about Babylon, and you'll quickly see that they were a wicked, rebellious empire. Babylon was so wicked that, in the minds of the biblical authors, the physical empire of Babylon came to be used as a metaphorical image to represent the spiritual rebellion of all people in the history of the world. In other words, when humans rebel against God in their pride and stubbornness, they become Babylon in their own right. This means the judgement God pronounces on Babylon for its rebellion throughout the biblical story extends to all humanity—to you and me. Just as Babylon fell to the Persians in 539BC, so too will all humans collapse under the weight of their own sin. We are Babylon. We're prideful, idolatrous, violent, and rebellious. God's desire for humans is not that we would suffer the judgement due our rebellion like Babylon did, but to instead walk with God in relationship, turning our rebellion into repentance and our pride into humble trust.

KEY THEMES IN DANIEL

KEY
THEME
#1

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

In Daniel 4, we read an account where the God of Daniel confronts the king of Babylon. In this confrontation, God makes the seemingly sovereign Nebuchadnezzar to act like a wild beast, driving him away for a time from the royal courts to the desolate fields. This forceful demotion broke Nebuchadnezzar's status and pride. Coming to his senses, the humbled Babylonian king confessed a timeless truth about the sovereign God: **"All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to**

him, 'What have you done?'" (Daniel 4:35). Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man in the ancient world, came to worship the God of Israel. The great Nebuchadnezzar was humbled under the hand of an even greater God. Because God is sovereign, we can rejoice that no man or nation can take away His divine purpose to redeem His world. Nobody is outside of God's control—not even the great Nebuchadnezzar. It is God who sits on the throne of the universe and **"works all things according to the counsel of his will"** (Ephesians 1:11). If God wills to act, **"no purpose of [God's] can be thwarted"** (Job 42:2).

KEY
THEME
#2

EXILE

The biblical theme of exile is not unique to the book of Daniel. In Genesis, humans were exiled from the Garden of Eden and relationship with God (Genesis 3:23). In the first chapter of Exodus, God's people lived as slaves in the foreign land of Egypt. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was exiled to Assyria about a century before Judah fell to Babylon. 600 years after Daniel's time, the Israelite Jesus Christ picked up on the biblical theme of exile and taught that all humans were in a state of spiritual exile. Jesus' teaching ministry could be viewed as an announcement of the true way home from spiritual exile. Look at Jesus' familiar words in John's Gospel: **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6). According

to Jesus, He himself was the way by which exiles can return to life in relationship with God. The apostle Peter also developed the theme of spiritual exile in his letters. Writing to churches scattered across Palestine, he addresses them as **"elect exiles,"** and **"sojourners"** in their respective locations (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). In his letters, Peter taught the spiritual exiles how to remain faithful to Jesus in a world that wasn't quite their home. Jesus' followers are spiritual exiles in this world, called to live faithfully in their homes away from home while awaiting the day where the world will be restored into their true home again—filled with the presence of Jesus himself.

KEY THEMES IN DANIEL

KEY
THEME
#3

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

You'll notice Daniel 7–12 reads much differently than the first section of the book. The second half of Daniel details a series of four divine, prophetic visions that were meant to give Daniel and the exiled Israelites hope for a triumphant future. These visions are rich with ancient imagery and symbolism that gave Daniel a glimpse into troubling times that awaited God's people. Evil kings and nations, symbolized by beasts, were going to rise up and persecute God's people. In short, the Babylonian exile was just the beginning of the troubles to come. Yet, the central message of

Daniel's visions is this: God's people can have hope in the face of persecution because God is in control and will one day defeat the beasts and rescue His people. This prophetic hope was not only for the people in Daniel's time. You and I today can look forward to the day when the evil powers and rulers in our world come to an end. God is committed to restoring our world. As they did for Daniel, these prophetic visions should strengthen our hope in God's future work. God is faithful. He alone gives His people a willing heart to thrive in exile.

DIG DEEPER INTO DANIEL

READ

Read through the book in one sitting. It'll take about an hour.

Download the YouVersion Bible app on your smart device.

Engage with a good Study Bible. We recommend the ESV.

WATCH

The Bible Project is a non-profit digital animation studio that makes videos exploring the books and major themes of the Bible.

You can watch "Daniel" and more for free at thebibleproject.com.

STUDY

Crossway Expository Commentary: *Daniel–Malachi*. (Popular)

IVP Dictionary of the Old Testament: *Prophets*. (Academic)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR STUDY, READ THROUGH THE FIRST SECTION OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL (CH 1-6) ON YOUR OWN OR OUT LOUD WITH A FEW OTHERS. THEN, WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS INDIVIDUALLY, AS A FAMILY, OR WITH YOUR LIFE GROUP.

Start the
Conversation

HAVE YOU EVER VISITED A CITY OR COUNTRY AND FELT OUT OF PLACE? WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THE BOOK OF DANIEL TO SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER READ IT?

1

WHY DID DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS GET APPOINTED TO SERVE IN THE PALACE OF BABYLON, AND WHAT CHALLENGES DID THEY FACE THERE?

DAN 1:1-21

2

WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE GOD GAVE DANIEL THE ABILITY TO INTERPRET DREAMS IN BABYLON, AND HOW DID THIS HELP HIM?

*DAN 2:1-49
DAN 4:4-27*

3

HOW IS THE BABYLONIAN EXILE IMPORTANT TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL? IN WHAT WAYS ARE ALL FOLLOWERS OF JESUS SPIRITUAL EXILES TODAY?

*DAN 1:1-7
2 KIN 25:1-21
1 PET 2:9-12*

4

WHAT DOES THE BOOK OF DANIEL TELL US ABOUT KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR, AND WHAT DOES GOD'S HUMBLING OF HIM TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

DAN 4:28-37

5

WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE STORIES OF THE FIERY FURNACE AND THE LIONS' DEN? HOW DO THEY ENCOURAGE YOU TO FAITHFULLY FOLLOW JESUS?

*DAN 3:1-30
DAN 6:1-28*