



Today we begin a new series in the Book of Daniel. The challenges we face as Christians today are not unlike what Daniel experienced in ancient Babylon. The subtitle for this series is “10 Commitments to Make When Life Closes In”. There are times when career, family, and other pressures make it feel like life is closing in on us. Trials squeeze us so much that we don’t always know what to do next. Today, we will discuss Daniel 1:1-7 and our first commitment: “I Will Live as an Exile.”

SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1:1-7

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe the culture in America today? What types of behaviors, attitudes, and general feelings would you mention? How have things changed in America regarding job pressures or family life in the last fifty years?
2. Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” Why do we often see cultural mistakes repeated throughout history? What makes societies so prone to repeat mistakes of the past? What are some examples?
3. Read 2 Chronicles 36:14-21, and answer the following questions:
 - a. What do these verses teach us about God’s word to Judah? What happened that caused Judah to be taken into captivity in Babylon?

The unfaithfulness of the leaders of the priests and peoples – “...all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 36:14).

God had pity on His people and His dwelling place, but they would not listen to His messengers – “But they mocked God’s messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy” (2 Chronicles 36:16).

- b. Judah was like her sister, Israel, who was also taken captive because of her unfaithfulness to God. However, in Judah, there remained a remnant of those who were faithful to God even

though the nation, as a whole, wasn't. Today, we see America is not unsimilar to Judah in that we have fallen away from God's commands as a nation. As Christians, we, too, can feel like captives because we are living in a nation quickly becoming far removed from the things of God. What examples in our culture and country reveal America's spiritual decline and show that we have turned our back on God as a nation?

4. According to Daniel 1:3-5, why were Daniel and his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, taken to Babylon by Ashpenaz under the king's order? What was the king's plan for these men, and perhaps others like them, once they were taken captive? Why was it important for the king of Babylon to "reeducate" these men?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were of royal and noble birth. They were taken to Babylon and were taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans (Babylonians). They would be "re-educated" for three years and then appear before the king.

5. What change was made to each man's identity when taken into captivity? Why is this important to note? How do we see our current culture seeking to change the identity of those who believe in Jesus?

Their names were changed to represent a new identity. They no longer represent the God of Israel but instead the false gods of Babylon. Our culture constantly seeks to change or do away with the commands of God, changing what is wrong to be right and what is right to be wrong. Anything in our lives or beliefs that acknowledge or honor God or reflect God is being criticized, defiled, and rapidly stripped away.

6. We realize in reading about Daniel's life that some things never change, as we saw in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "nothing is new under the sun." Wickedness remained unchanged in the strategy to separate people from God and remove Him entirely from their lives/identities. What similarities do you see between Babylon in the time of Daniel and the culture in America today?

Ruled by Wickedness

Babylon – A land that does not follow God and instead worships numerous false gods and is ruled by a prideful and wicked king

America – Wickedness in Hollywood and Social Media piping lies into our homes every day; there is a total disregard for life and marriage

Indoctrination

Babylon – People are taken against their will, and there is an attempt to change their culture and customs.

America – At almost every level, from corporate America to TV, to social media, Americans are being

fed lies. If we choose not to buy into the new cultural norms, there is a risk of exposure or punishment, such as “being canceled.”

Loss of Personal Identity

Babylon – Daniel, Hanaiah, Mishael, and Azariah had their names changed, and they were given a new identity to reflect a new worldview and life.

America – There is so much confusion about gender in our current culture. It creates chaos as people are free to identify themselves as anything (even an animal) as long as it isn't in Christ.

7. Much like Daniel, we are called to live as exiles. This world is not our home. As we wait for our Savior to return and take us to our heavenly home, how can we live as faithful exiles before the Lord? What does 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 tell us about the troubles of this life?

Realize this world is temporary. One of the verses we have studied the last few weeks is 1 John 2:17, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” We need to remember this world is temporary, and the pressures, afflictions, and difficulties of this life are momentary and will pass away. We are waiting for our heavenly home and eternal glory.

We have a heavenly Father who desires to help us, strengthen us, and guide us in all situations.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

8. What can we learn from the story of Daniel that can help us when we face confusing or uncertain seasons in life? How can you serve one another in your small group when these seasons arrive?

When things seem to be falling apart, they're actually falling into place.

We live in a broken world because of sin. Everything we see and experience is the fallout of sin in Genesis 3. On top of that, we have a loving, Supreme, All-Knowing, All-Powerful God who is working out a plan that is bigger than we can comprehend. The ultimate place of growth is to realize and surrender to this truth.