

THRIVING in BABYLON

A STUDY OF DANIEL

SERMON TITLE: Living in Two Worlds
SCRIPTURE: Selected Scriptures

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Sometimes life feels like it's all about survival. Sometimes it feels like all we can do is keep our head above water. This is true for everyone, but especially for followers of Jesus. As Christians, we are exiles, and that means that survival is doubly difficult. But God has not called us to just survive; he has called us to thrive. And the place that God called us to thrive is in Babylon - the place of our exile. With this in view, the book of Daniel is a perfect picture for us of what it looks like to be faithful in a foreign land that isn't our home. Daniel doesn't merely survive in Babylon. Rather, with God's help, he thrives there. What would it look like for us to do the same here in Greenville?

Last week we finished up our study through the book of Daniel as we looked at Daniel's final vision recorded for us in chapters 10-12. However, there is something in Daniel that we haven't really explored, but to my thinking, it deserves an entire message. It's not something that is specifically explained in the text, but it's something Daniel understood and he assumes his readers understand. But it's something I don't think most of us understand, at least not to the depth that Daniel did. What am I talking about? As God revealed to Daniel that there would be a train of empires that would dominate the political landscape of the future—first Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, and then many other empires would rise and fall up until the final beast of "Babylon" in the days just before Jesus returns to set up his kingdom on earth—Daniel understood that behind the beastly kingdoms of men there were evil, spiritual beings that were influencing the course of history. Or said another way—Daniel understood that what is going on here on earth was inseparably connected to what is going on in the heavenly realms. And this is not something that was just being played out on the stage of world history—it's also something that intersected Daniel's personal life—and—it intersects with our daily lives as well. Daniel understood that he lived in two worlds—the earthly realm and a heavenly realm—a heavenly realm populated by spiritual beings both good and evil. Now, if you are a follower of Jesus you probably believe everything I've said so far. In the heavenly realm, the unseen, spiritual realm, you believe in God and his angels and Satan and his demons. Not that Satan is God's evil equal, but he and his demon staff-team oppose God and the people of God and there's ongoing conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, something we refer to as spiritual warfare. So far so good—but what we see in the book of Daniel—and as we'll see—all through the Old and New Testaments—is that this whole idea of spiritual warfare is described in much more detail than what you may realize. And so, I want to pull back the curtain to help you better understand what's going on behind the scenes. I'm going to look at two key passages in Daniel and then I'll hyperlink those passages to other Scriptures so you can "see" your world like Daniel and other biblical authors did. I'll warn you—for some of you this is going to sound like the Twilight Zone—or the X-files—not that I believe in Area 51 or anything or maybe I do—but let's not go there—JK—but we are going to dive into the deep end of the pool this morning—and we're going to look at a lot of Scripture b/c there's no way you're going to buy into what I'm saying unless you can see how it's talked about all through the Bible. I will say, I received a lot of help putting this message together from Michael Heiser's book "Supernatural," and from Tim Mackie's Bible Project videos entitled "Spiritual Beings"—which are all available on YouTube or from the Bible Project website—<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/spiritual-beings/> and I highly recommend them. I was also privileged to hear Tim speak on all this at my post-doctoral study retreat this past May. So thank you Michael Heiser and Tim Mackie.

From the beginning of this whole exile series we've been asking the same basic question: *How do we remain faithful to God as exiles living in a world that is growing more and more hostile toward our beliefs and values?* And this morning, I'll tell you my answer right up front: *In order to remain faithful in exile we need to embrace the worldview held by the characters and authors of Scripture.* Because, if we don't see as they saw, we will not be able to live as they lived.

Read Daniel 7:9-10 — God is on his throne, ruling in the heavenly realms and there are other spiritual beings there with him—so many you can't count them all. The question is: How is God exercising his rule and authority over all the bad stuff going on in our world? He is ruling through the agency of his heavenly staff-team—through 10,000 x 10,000 heavenly helpers. Not that God needs help, but God has sovereignly chosen to exercise his rule over heaven and earth through spirit and human beings. What Daniel sees here is what the Bible calls The Divine Council.

Read Psalm 82:1, Psalm 89:5-7, and 1 Kings 22:19-22 — Taken together, these passages clearly show us that God sovereignly rules over this world and our daily lives through his heavenly staff-team who participate in discussing and carrying out his plans. An example from Daniel is found in 4:13-17.

Now go back and read Psalm 82:1-8. You see in this psalm that there are ruling, rebel, spiritual beings at work in this world. However, God says that one day they will be judged and done away with once and for all. Now read Deuteronomy 4:16-20 and 32:7-9 —Moses is talking about an event in the distant past when Yahweh "allotted" the nations. This is a clear reference to Genesis 10-11—the list of 70 nations (10), and the scattering of the people at the Tower of Babel (11)—the first Babylon. Moses says that Yahweh scattered the people, gave them their own languages, and he divided them up (set boundaries for them)—*according to the number of the sons of God*, but he kept Israel for himself as his own special portion. So after Babel, God rejected the nations and kept Israel as his one special people. Taken together these passages in Deuteronomy 4 and 32 and in Genesis 10-11 tell us that the rebellion and the scattering of the people at Babel had both a human and spiritual dimension. Humans wanted to build a tower to reconnect heaven and earth as in the Garden, but we also see here that there were some rebel "sons of God" involved as well, who, according to Deut4 are now being worshipped by the nations. Think of the gods of Egypt, India, China, Mesopotamia, the early people groups of North and South America, Africa, etc. There are several texts in the OT Prophets that show us *how conflicts among empires in the human realm mirror conflict in the spiritual realm* and Daniel 10 is a great example...

Read Daniel 10:5-6, 12-13, 20-21 —The message given to Daniel reveals a biblical heaven and earth *worldview* where the nations of this world are given over to the authority of a spiritual rebel called the "prince" of that nation. And we see that when God is at work to redeem and rescue *his people* from among these nations, the earthly conflict mirrors a heavenly one as well. We see that there is a *human* king of Persia and a *spiritual* "prince" of Persia. But again, one day, God's justice will punish the "host of heaven on high and the kings of the earth on earth" (Read Isaiah 24:21-23). So here's the deal—The biblical authors are very much aware that powers of evil are at work in human societies and nations. Those powers of evil offer people different forms of idolatry—technology, sex, personal power, military power—that end up corrupting humans and ruining whole societies. This is what happens when humans worship the "gods" of the nations, rather than Yahweh, *the One True and Living God*.

Now let's fast forward to the NT. *How do we see these things played out in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and in our lives as well?* Read Matthew 4:8-11, then Luke 22:52-53, then Colossians 2:15, then Matthew 28:19-20, then Ephesians 1:20-23. All that we looked at in the heavenly/human worldview of the OT, shows up in the NT. Jesus clearly understood that everything that happened to him on earth was inseparable connected to a spiritual battle raging in the heavenly realms.

Now read Ephesians 6:10-17 — Paul tells us that the real enemy we face is not made of flesh and blood. Your enemy is not human. Your enemy is not your spouse, your boss, or your neighbor you don't like. Your enemy is not the person who slandered you and talked bad about you or snubbed you or thinks they're better than you. Your real enemy is not a politician or a group of politicians in the political party you despise, No, behind the mental, emotional, physical, relational, spiritual conflicts in your life there are rulers, authorities, dark spiritual forces that want to take you down. The real enemies we face are idolatrous, rebel *spiritual powers* that animate our cultural idols that inspire hatred, division, and violence—*spiritual powers* that enslave people who have been deceived by them—your enemy is never another human. The way you resist these spiritual enemies is by "putting on the whole armor of God." That is, putting on the character traits of Jesus like armor—faithfulness, justice, love, and peace. He said that our only weapon is the Word of God. That is, the biblical story of Good News that Jesus has overcome all rebels with the divine power of his life and love.

Discussion Starters:

We covered a lot of Scripture today—all of which are listed in the Sermon Notes above. I have two suggestions. First, if possible, have your group watch the Bible Project Video on the Divine Counsel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1rai6WoOJU>). After watching the video, begin by asking: "From what you just watched and what you heard in Charlie's message today, What are some of the "AHAs" you had? What new thoughts and insights did you have?" What did you hear that resonated with you?

When someone volunteers an "AHA" ask follow up questions to dig deeper and to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, "Anyone else have this same "AHA"? What do you think about this insight?" After you've exhausted topic, throw the original question back out to the group again—"Who else had an "AHA?" —Repeat the pattern above. —

If someone says, "I didn't really have an "AHA," it's more something I don't quite understand." Then go that direction. Ask follow-up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue. "Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?" Ask the group for input, "So, how would you answer that question?" Whoever answers, ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (What do you think about that?), etc.

It's been my (Charlie) experience that you can have a great discussion around this approach to community group conversations.

Here are some other discussion questions you might use:

- How does Psalm 82 help you us understand Eph. 6:10-12?
- How does God compare with other "gods" in these passages?
- How does hearing about these spiritual beings change how you see the world?
- C.S. Lewis noted that there are two dangers concerning the demonic: one is to ignore them, the other is to be overly fascinated by them. What are the risks of each?
- What is your source of comfort and assurance as you read about the spiritual realm? About the spiritual warfare going on in the spiritual realm?
- How might this bigger picture of spiritual beings change the way you share the gospel with someone from a polytheistic culture?
- How does this teaching expand your view of worship? (see Ps 29:1-2)
- How might the knowledge that there are spiritual forces opposed to God change the way you pray?
- How does this teaching breathe new life into the Lord's Prayer?
- End your time by reading the Lord's prayer together from Matthew 6:9-13.