

# THRIVING in BABYLON

A STUDY OF DANIEL

SERMON TITLE: Thriving in Babylon  
SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1:1-7

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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 merely called us to 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?

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Every generation has to answer the question—*What does it mean to be the people of God in our time and place? What does it mean to be the people of God in our time and place?* Every generation has to ask and wrestle with and answer that question. But we need to bring that question down to an even more specific question—*How do we live like Jesus in a society that has embraced beliefs and values that are not our own? How do we following the way of Jesus—when we are immersed in a culture that's labels us as irrelevant—at best—and dangerous—at worst?* Because in the last 25 years or so there's been a seismic shift in our culture. We're not in Kansas anymore. We've evolved from what sociologist called a "Christian" culture to a "Post-Christian" culture. We have moved from the majority to the minority, from the center to the fringe, from being well-respected to disrespected. We will most likely live the entirety of our lives in an increasingly diverse, divided, hateful, and fragile world. And so, with change and chaos being the norm, a nostalgic desire to return to yesteryear is tempting, but instead of longing for the past, we must learn from the past—which—leads us to our new series in the book of Daniel.

**READ Daniel 1:1-7** — In these verses we see that the Babylonians were trying to erase all traces of Jewish identity, belief, and convictions from Daniel and his three friends by totally immersing them in Babylonian culture (cultural immersion). The feelings of these exiles is expressed by an exilic poet in Psalm 137:1-4. The book of Daniel will show the exiles how they can sing the songs of Zion in a foreign land and provide tracks that will help the exiles, not just survive, but thrive.

**Let's review**—Exile is a theme that actually starts long before Dan 1. It starts with Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden if you know that story in Genesis 3. You see it again at the end of Genesis and in the book of Exodus. It runs all the way through to the exilic literature in the OT—Daniel and Esther—Ezra and Nehemiah, 2 Chronicles. There are all sorts of stuff written *about* and *during* the exile. Then it goes all the way into the New Testament to Jesus—the ultimate exile—and then to the books of 1 and 2 Peter that we just studied our way through. There are two ways to not live in exile—they are the ways of separation and syncretism. First, we are not to live separate from the surrounding culture. Second, we are not to compromise with culture. The way to thrive in exile is live as a "creative minority." Pastor, author, speaker Jon Tyson defines a creative minority as "A Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships knotted together in a living network of persons in a complex and challenging culture setting who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world." Jonathan Sacks writes—"To become a creative minority is not easy because it involves maintaining strong links with the outside world while staying true to your faith. Seeking not merely to keep the sacred flame burning, but also to transform the larger society of which you are a part. This is, as Jews can testify, a demanding and risk-laden choice." Honestly, the Church's track record on living in this tension is not all that good because it's hard. It's hard to stay true to the way of Jesus without getting sucked into what everybody else is doing. Actually, it's the old question: "How do we live in the world but not of the world?" And this is exactly the question that the book of Daniel helps answer.

So how did Daniel, with all the baggage that comes with exile—how did he not only survive the exile, but thrive in exile?

Big Picture—two observations—

First, Scripture formed Daniel's way of looking at exile (cf Jeremiah 29:4-7).

Second, God's sovereignty informed his understanding of how to thrive in exile (Daniel 1:3, Jer 1:4).

Scripture and God's sovereignty are the two tracks that thriving in exile run on.

There's a powerful insight buried in Dan 1: 4—in the phrase "youths/young men without blemish or without physical defect. The Hebrew word for without blemish is the same exact Hebrew term that's used to describe an animal that was fitting for sacrifice to the Lord. *So do you see what this means?* Daniel is a person living in exile, living in a foreign land, living as a sacrifice to bring God's blessing to all people. But of course, Daniel is an Old Testament pointer to Jesus, the ultimate exile. Jesus is the fulfillment of the life that's briefly modeled by Daniel. Jesus is a *stranger* in the world, caught up in a different story, living for the will of his Heavenly Father, living by a different set of values, but he's also a *friend* to that world. He is a stranger and a friend and the ultimate sacrifice who brings life and blessing to all who put their faith and trust in him. Are we not called to be the same task? Didn't Paul say, "Present yourselves as living sacrifices to God. Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might discern what is the will of God (in this time and place)—what is good and acceptable and perfect? (Romans 12:1-2). We are to be set apart for God, but not separated from our culture—both stranger and friend—never isolated, but sent to be in the world, but not of it. Yes, like Daniel, but even more so, like Jesus.

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#### Discussion Starters

Have someone read Daniel 1:1-7

1. What was your biggest take away from today's teaching?
2. How would you answer the question—What does it mean to be the people of God in our time and place—in our culture today? How would you tell your kids or grandkids?
3. What signs have you seen or stories have you heard that reinforce the idea that we are living in a Post-Christian culture?
4. Why did the Babylonians do all the things they did to Daniel and his three friends? What was their goal?
5. How should we not live in exile in our modern-day Babylon? Put these two in your own words.
6. What is the danger in each? What's the better way?
7. What is a "creative minority"? Why is it hard to live this way?
8. What were the two tracks that Daniel ran on that enabled him to thrive in exile? Why are these two things the most important things?