

Daniel 1 - How can my life make an impact?

December 2, 2012

Good morning! I want to say a special hello to those connecting live through the Internet. It is good to have you. This morning, we begin a new series that will bring us through Christmas and into the new year. It is a series on the book of Daniel.

I don't know if you have read this book. I hope you take the time to read it during the holidays. It is fascinating. It is very practical. Even though it is in the Old Testament, Christ shows up a number of times. That makes it an appropriate book to study during the Christmas season.

This morning, I have two goals. First, I will introduce the book. Second, we will cover the first chapter. That is a lot to cover in 30 minutes so buckle up, turn to the book of Daniel, which is found on page 737 of the pew Bibles, and let's dive in.

Introduction to Daniel

How does Daniel fit into world history?

The book of Daniel was written around 600 BC. God's people were warned many times not to rebel and worship the false gods of their neighbors, which were demons. They didn't listen. As a result, God raised up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to attack Jerusalem. In God's patience, he didn't destroy Jerusalem at once but God gave his people an opportunity to repent. 2 Kings 24-25 tells us Nebuchadnezzar had three campaigns against Jerusalem in the years 605, 597 and 587 BC. The last campaign was

Jerusalem's third, and final, strike. At that point, Nebuchadnezzar plowed it completely under.

In the first campaign, Nebuchadnezzar took some of the most gifted and talented young men of Israel back to Babylon. Daniel was part of that group. That begins the book of Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar wasn't a push over. He was very powerful and very intelligent. He knew it. He had a huge ego problem. Babylon became a world superpower under his leadership. The city of Babylon, that he built, was the largest city the world had ever seen. The territory he conquered included modern day Israel, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran. That is a lot to control before cell phones and smart bombs.

What should I know about the Babylonian culture?

Babylon's hobbies included astrology, magic, the occult, demon worship, polytheism and prostitution. It was not the kind of culture we would want our children exposed to. Everything about it would worry a parent sick. Yet that was where Daniel was taken as a POW. He was between the ages of 14-16 when he was taken away. He never saw Israel again. All he had with him was his AWANA Bible verses, his faith, prayer, and later he had access to some of the Hebrew Old Testament books. That is not much to survive on, yet, because God was with him, that was enough.

Why did Daniel write the book?

That is a trick question. Ultimately, God wrote the book, because he inspired Daniel to write it. From Daniel's perspective, there are two big points he wanted the book's readers to remember.

1. **God is large and in charge.** It doesn't matter what a situation looks like. It doesn't matter if the world looks like it is spinning out of control. Even the most powerful rulers on the planet are completely under God's control. Nothing can happen that is out of God's hand. God is in complete control of world history, and he is in complete control of your history. Nothing happens anywhere on this planet that God is not in control of, and God is good. That is something we need to remember when a spouse walks out on us. We need to remember this when we aren't accepted into the college we hoped for. We need to remember this when we lose a job and don't know how to put food on the table for our families. We need to remember this when we are single and God doesn't bring Mr. or Miss Right into our lives. The world is not out of control. God has us exactly where he wants us to be for us to glorify him with our lives at that time in history. Look how God controls history.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. Daniel 1:1–2 (ESV)

There are two ways to look at history. It is unknown and spiraling out of control or God is in complete control. From the perspective of the man on the street, Nebuchadnezzar and his gods just spanked the God of

Jerusalem and his people. The reality is God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to discipline his people, and he gave his people into Nebuchadnezzar's hand to break them from their idolatry.

2. **Faithfulness to God matters, especially in little things.** In this book, we will see Daniel repeatedly put under pressure to make spiritual compromises. Most of us would bend under that pressure. Daniel didn't. Daniel's faithfulness in little things opened the door for God to use him in big ways. We will study this more in a moment.

How is the book structured?

It is written in two languages.

The book is written in two languages. A good portion of it is Hebrew, like the rest of the Old Testament. A large middle section of Daniel is written in Aramaic. Not much of the Old Testament is written in Aramaic. This makes Daniel unique.

It is composed of two pieces.

The book is put together in two pieces. The first half, chapters one-six, have the famous hero stories that many of us know. It has the story of Daniel in the lions den and Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace. All of them underscore that God is large and in charge, plus God blesses obedience.

The second half of the book is often ignored. It is written in what is called the apocalyptic genre. The book of Revelation is also written in this style. It reads like a science-fiction novel with lions that have wings, bears that stand on one foot, and goats with 10 horns. It can be really freaky. Don't fear. We will

study that portion of the book, and it is not as incomprehensible as it appears.

We will discover that the apocalyptic sections of Daniel have some amazing prophecy about the Babylonian empire, the Persian empire, the Greek empire, the Roman empire and how the world will wrap up. It will be fun to teach.

The prophecies written in the second half of the book give such an accurate portrayal of the way world history would unfold from the time of Daniel to the time of Christ that if you go to a liberal seminary, they will tell you the book of Daniel was not written in 600 B.C. Some people claim it is too accurate. They believe it had to be history written after the fact. Liberal seminaries date the book around 150 B.C.

Does it really matter when the book was written? Yes! It is easy to write history after the fact. If it is history after the fact then the book doesn't matter. If the book was written by Daniel in 600 B.C. like everyone, including the Jews in Jesus' day, believed then the book of Daniel is an amazing revelation of just how much God is in charge of the world stage. It reminds us that no matter what happens to us. God has everything in his hands.

[How can my life make an impact?](#)

Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore

he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, Daniel 1:3–9 (ESV)

As we learned, Nebuchadnezzar was conquering everything. There is a problem when you go for world domination. You eventually conquer more people than your army can police. Then portions of your empire rebel. It is one of the nasty side effects that go with world domination. Nebuchadnezzar had a plan to overcome it. He took the best and brightest young men from the countries he conquered and brought them to Babylon. He transformed them into Babylonians, and he put them to work for him. When your kids have a high-ranking position with Nebuchadnezzar, you tend to not rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, even if he is taxing you to death. That was the plan for Daniel, his three friends and the other young men exiled to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was brilliant, and I believe he was Satanically-inspired. He developed a very effective plan to brainwash young men from foreign countries to work for him. It is worth studying how he did this because this is the same tactic that is used today against our young adults. If you can identify the plan of the enemy, you have a chance to defeat it.

What are the strategies of the enemy to ruin my impact?

Change the way I think

Daniel and his three friends were put into an intense three-year education program. They went to college. Most people are excited for their children to get an education. An education will help you succeed. It will open the doors you need to higher-paying jobs. That is good. I want you to notice that the education these men were given was not neutral. It was not just world history and math.

There was an agenda to it. Daniel 1:20 tells us they learned magic and enchanting. These young men's education was in the occult and demonic worship. The goal of their education was not just to teach them information. It was to change the way they thought. It was to give them the world view of Babylon and destroy the world view of Israel.

This is nothing new. When you go to public school they teach you that you evolved from a monkey. They teach you there was a chance collision of particles and you are the result. They will teach you God doesn't exist. What are they teaching? They are trying to change the way you think. It is the same thing Daniel faced. I want us to notice how Daniel faced it. Did Daniel refuse to learn it? No! We get to verse 20, we find he was 10 times better than everybody else. He learned it, but he didn't adopt it. He learned it so he could talk with the people who believed it.

Think of it from a modern angle. He understands the science behind evolution so he can talk with people about evolution. Daniel knew the science of evolution better than the scientists who believed it.

Change where I find my identity

In this chapter, we find Daniel and his friends are given new names. Why did the Babylonians change their names? Daniel and his three friends all had Hebrew names that contained God's name in them. Their Hebrew names reminded them that God was in control of their lives and their future. Their new names were based off the names of Babylonian deities. When they heard their

new names they were reminded that the Babylonian deities gave them all the success and power in their lives.

Even more subtle was their new names gave them automatic respect in the Babylonian culture because their new names connected them with Babylonian gods. It would be to their advantage to forget their old names. It would make sense to use their new names and gain the respect and admiration of the Babylonian people. The temptation they faced was to find their identity in something other than God.

We face this all the time. It is a huge temptation for our students. Where does your identity come from? Does your identity come from a football field, a wrestling mat, your ACT scores, your 4.0, your success on a cross country track or a bank account? When people hear a name and they identify it with something they admire, it is easy to have that become your identity. The truth is all sports will fade into oblivion. All money will fade into nothing. The only thing that matters is who we are in relationship to God. That is our identity. Don't get seduced into thinking we are anything outside of God.

Create compromise

The third prong of the strategy was to create compromise. The young men taken to Babylon were given food to eat from the king's table. What is at issue here? The scholars are divided. Let me give you the options. The first option is the offense was Jewish dietary laws. The Jews were taught to obey dietary laws from Leviticus. They were easy to keep when you lived in Jerusalem, but they were hard to keep in Babylon. For example, they weren't to

eat pork. The king's table undoubtedly had foods that weren't kosher. The second reason why the food might be defiling is that the king's food was probably sacrificed to a Babylonian deity before it was served. That was standard Babylonian practice. If Daniel and his friends ate it, they would have subtly said they were seeking that Babylonian deity's blessing upon their health. The third option, which I think is a real possibility, is they would whet their appetite for high-end living by eating the king's food. Once you get used to caviar, it is hard to go back to hot dogs and beans. Imagine how it would feel to eat right from the table of the most powerful man on the planet? Imagine the quality of the food and the way every meal was prepared. One of the most effective ways to get to the heart of a man is through his stomach. That is how my wife got ahold of my heart. I believe that is how Nebuchadnezzar was going after the heart of Daniel and his three friends.

Whatever way you look at it, the strategy employed to capture their hearts involved getting them to compromise in small areas. It would just be a dietary law they were breaking. Nobody would know because they no longer lived around their parents in Jerusalem. Did you see those steaks? Did you smell that food? Before long these Jerusalem captives would be loving the posh life of exile in Babylon compared to the rough life in Jerusalem. Their hearts would be sold out to serving Nebuchadnezzar, their new king.

Little by little their identities would be changed. My friends, God is large and in charge. He is watching. He blesses obedience, especially when we refuse to compromise in the little areas. You know what happens when we start

compromising in little things? We suffocate God's blessing upon our lives. We take away the opportunity to be a person of high impact for God's kingdom with our lives.

God knows. He is watching. He knows when we stretch the truth. He knows when we click on that web site in the middle of the night. He knows when we go to that party. He knows when we cheat by looking at last year's exam, even if everybody is doing it. He knows when our eyes linger on someone of the opposite sex. He knows what is playing on the silver screen of our thought lives when we lay in bed. We aren't fooling him. God has the events of the world completely under control, and he also knows everything there is to know about us. We aren't fooling him. He will bless obedience.

How can I have a life of great impact for God?

A life of great impact always begins with the small choices.

In many ways, the decision of Daniel and his friends to not compromise in the little area of food in chapter one is what unlocks the possibility of Daniel not compromising in big areas of life for the rest of the book. Do you think that the other young men who were taken captive thought Daniel and his friends were nuts? Do you think they thought Daniel and his friends were taking godly obedience too seriously? Of course they did. At the end of the day, whose life had a high impact for God? Young men and young women, your faithfulness to Christ in the little things of life when you are young unlocks the possibility of God using you in a big way when you are old.

A life of great impact begins when I decide how I will handle temptation before I face it.

Verse eight tells us Daniel resolved in his heart ahead of time how he would handle temptation to compromise when he faced it. It wasn't an issue he thought about at the last minute or under pressure. He decided to not compromise on the food before he smelled the food from the king's kitchen. What happens when you wait to the last minute to make those decisions? You give in.

A life of great impact means willingness to take risks of obedience where only God can provide.

One of the ways this passage is misused is some people think it is justification to go vegan. Daniel said no to the steak, the sushi and all the meats on the menu. He just ate salad and water. That is a basic diet. The eunuch in charge of Daniel and his friends was understandably concerned. Salad and water is not the diet of champions. You need protein and nutrient-rich foods. This was not a plea to go vegan. It doesn't work out on paper. You don't eat salad and water and up healthier than those who eat at the all-you-can-eat buffet.

What was happening? God stepped in and honored the obedience of Daniel and his friends. God honored their refusal to compromise by performing a nutritional miracle. God made them healthier in spite of what they didn't eat. In addition, he honored them intellectually and made them 10 times smarter than everyone else. This is very important. When we honor God, especially in the little things, we can expect God to honor us. That doesn't mean he will make us

comfortable, but the honor he gives will allow us to be high impact people for him.

God will consistently put us in positions where it doesn't look like it makes no sense to honor God. God will put us in positions just like Daniel found himself, where it looks smart to bend God's rules. That is a test from God. It is a test to see if you are worthy to receive God's blessing upon your life. For Daniel, it involved eating salad instead of steak, yet he was healthier and stronger than other because God bent the rules of nutrition.

A modern version of this I hear all the time in premarital counseling involves couples living together before marriage. When I tell them God's will is for them to not live together until their wedding night, they usually say the reason they live together is because they can't afford to live apart. That is a test. You can't afford to not live apart. You do the right thing to honor God sexually before marriage and he will honor you in marriage. He will honor you by making it work out financially to live apart before your wedding night. I have never met a couple that chose to live apart before the wedding night and regretted it once married. I have never met a couple where the groom chose to move out until the wedding but he died of cold and starvation. You honor God, and he will honor you.

God honors those who honor him.

A classic illustration of this is the Eric Liddell story. He was an amazing runner from Scotland who was set to run in the 100-yard dash in the 1924 Olympics. When he discovered it would be run on a Sunday, in his conscience before God, he thought he would dishonor God by competing on the Sabbath.

He withdrew from the event because honoring God was more important than the honor of a gold medal. What did God do with this? Through a series of events it was possible for him to run in the 440-yard dash on a different day, an event he was not favored to win. Before he ran the event, an American gave him a crib note. Written on that paper was 1 Samuel 2:30. The words were “Those who honor me, I will honor.” Liddell ran that race and set the world record that stood for 12 years. There was even a movie made about it called “Chariots of Fire.”

Liddell’s story is a great example of a man willing to pay the price to honor God in little things. That unlocked the potential for him to be a man of great impact for God.

The million dollar question is, “How does this connect with Christmas?” Do you remember the wise men from the east in the Christmas story? Do you remember the wise men that came to give gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh? They were astrologers, wise men of the east. When you study them, you discover they came from Babylon. In this book, we find that Daniel eventually becomes the head of the astrologers and wise men in Babylon. Rather than his wisdom coming from demons and the occult, it came from God. His life left such a huge impact upon the wise men of the Babylonian culture that 500 years after he was dead and gone the wise men were more aware of Christ’s birth from Daniel’s words in Babylon than the religious leaders were in Jerusalem.

That is the kind of lasting impact life each of us want to lead. We want to lead a life that hundreds of years after our death the echo of our lives are resounding through the corridors of history pointing people to Jesus. How does a

high-impact life like that begin? By realizing little choices make a big difference.

God honors those who honor him, especially in the little things.



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