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Sermon: God Rules in Babylon
Rose Hill Church
April 26, 2026

Over the next several weeks we are going to take a deep dive into the Old Testament book of Daniel, and what an experience this will be!

To set the stage for these coming sermons, I want to lay out for you some things you should know before we begin:

The authorship of this book is claimed within the text to be a fellow named Daniel. When the narrative starts, he is a Jewish youth from the Judean king's family or court. This writer begins the book by placing it in the context of human history; "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah..." History tells us that this Judean king reigned from 609 to 598 BCE (or BC, as many are used to), so about 11 years. He had been appointed by Pharaoh Necho 2nd of Egypt. This time in Judah's history was rough, with its government and military weakened, and other countries taking control of the land. It was a devastating time in Judah, where there was a succession of sieges of God's people over years by Babylon. In 605 BCE Judah saw the first

such siege against Jerusalem. Daniel himself describes this attack, where Babylonian troops overtook Jerusalem and took King Jehoiakim and several from the royal family and nobility into captivity in Babylon. Daniel was one of those taken. Babylon also plundered some of the holy relics from the Temple in Jerusalem and took these back, where the Babylonian king placed these sacred items in the temple of his god.

But, and this is really important to grasp here, **the Book of Daniel is the story not only of human historical events that took place from 605 BCE to about 537 BCE, and recorded in some detail here in Daniel, but it is God's story of amazing grace and faithfulness to His people, no matter if the world itself seemed to be falling apart.**

So, I want to read to you the first chapter of Daniel in its entirety, to set the stage for our exploration of this amazing book:

Daniel's Training in Babylon Daniel 1:1-21

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia^[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ^[b] ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the

king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah:

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your^[c] food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah,¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so, they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Let's Pray:

As we break down this first chapter, there are several things to note:

- First, and this is critical for God's people-Daniel gives a human perspective in verse one, then in verse two the perspective of one who follows God; "And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim King of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar's) hand." **You will find this**

juxtaposition of world views throughout the text of Daniel; the way of humanity and the way of God. You can tell that Daniel keeps God's views in mind as he writes his story. **For the believer today, we must also embrace this way of viewing and living in the world; we are in this world but not of it, just like Daniel.**

- Second, in the world's ways, we see the insidious nature of a godless leader who is cruel, vicious and completely self-consumed. Nebuchadnezzar has a plan to remake some of Judah's brightest and best young people into his own image. This included changing their language, their religion, their culture, even what they ate, as well as their very names! **It was nothing less than an indoctrination into a culture completely foreign to these young men and antithetical to who God had made them to be.**
- Third, we might find it interesting that the food Daniel and his friends were supposed to eat was likely meats like pork, as well as those sacrificed to idols, thus forbidden according to Jewish law at the time.

- Finally, a couple of notes about the structure of the Book of Daniel;

Chapters 1-6 are primarily biographical in nature, tracing Daniel's witness in the royal court of Babylon. Chapters 7-12 contain a record of Daniel's visions of God's purposes for the future. And something you won't be able to determine from reading Daniel in English; Daniel Chapter 2, verse 4b to chapter 7 verse 28 were all originally written in Aramaic. This language was an international language as early as the ninth to eighth century BCE. The pattern for the Book of Daniel is that the first part, the part concerned with Jewish history and culture, is written in Hebrew, then, where the discussion is about non-Jewish and international matters, the text was originally written in Aramaic. The text again reverts to Hebrew in the latter chapters, when the context focuses on, "God's people and prophecies". Why Daniel wrote the book this way, we don't know for sure, but it not only shows Daniel's significant worldly education, but it also shows the

possibility that Daniel had a deep intent to communicate a profound message beyond just his own people.

Now let's look at how God held onto His people in this foreign and very difficult environment: In verse 9 it says, "Now God had caused the official (the one overseeing Daniel and his young friends) to show favor and compassion to Daniel". This official mind you was terrified of the king, saying that this king would execute him for disobeying. Daniel here asks the official to feed he and his friends with healthy foods, vegetables and water, rather than rich foods from the king's table.

It turned out that what Daniel and the others were given was better for them than the rich food and drink ordered up by the king. Not only did they find favor and health, but in verse 17 we see that "God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds."

We finish the chapter with the completion of the training for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, so they entered the king's

service. And it says they were ten times better than “all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom”.

What is so essential to grasp here is not simply human history, nor just a “good Bible story”. **This is really about the ongoing story of God’s masterful redemption of a people for His own possession.** This idea of a people for God’s own possession is woven throughout the entire Bible, both from the Old and New Testaments: We read it in Exodus 19:5-6; as well as in **1 Peter 2:9-10** “⁹ **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;** ¹⁰ **for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”**

So, in finishing up, what we will see in the coming weeks is truly a man after God’s own heart, and a group of young men who through a seeking of God and His will, His ways and His Word, find that **it**

doesn't truly matter where they find themselves, nor where we find ourselves, for God is utterly faithful and true and will accomplish His will and purposes, even and especially when our world feels like it is falling apart. That is as true for us today, as it was in Daniel's time, between 2,500 and 2,600 years ago.

One last thought; I want to encourage you each to take some time and read through the Book of Daniel over these coming weeks, so you are ready for what God wants to teach us through this most incredible book of history, prophecy and apocalyptic literature.