

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Thriving in Babylon

(Studies in the life and times of the prophet Daniel)

Thriving in Babylon

Study #7

Introduction: Daniel's Babylon and ours...

The prophet Daniel's sense of right and wrong was assaulted every time he walked the streets of Babylon.¹

In Babylon, he saw pagan temples to gods that are not gods. He saw the opulence and extravagant lifestyles of the rich and powerful AND the plight of the servant class. He saw rampant sexual immorality and violence and injustice.

He saw all of this as he walked on Babylon's streets to the place where he worked - which happened to be the palace of the king who ruled over this place that assaulted his sense of right and wrong.

Daniel was a major player in the administrations of several kings. Over the years he rose to the level of what we might call secretary of state. He was a key leader in the very place that practiced what he hated and that offended the God he loved.

And while tackling assignments for the kings he served over six decades, Daniel was always, first, God's man in Babylon. Talk about a tricky dance.

¹ "Babylon" is the term the Bible uses in various places to describe something that is altogether wicked. "Babylon" is the anti-God state. (See Revelation 17-18)

He navigated life with great wisdom, was faithful when he faced danger, and depended on God even after the external "props" of home and family and familiarity were knocked away.

Daniel's faith thrived in Babylon. He didn't retreat from engagement with his culture. He was fully engaged AND he made a difference for his God in that culture.

Over the past several weeks you and I have been looking to Daniel to find keys to thriving in our own Babylon.

Today, if you surf the Web you'll find as many reasons to be troubled as Daniel had.

People we know and love are caught up in sexual confusion, addictive behaviors, and the false promise of material wealth. Lots of our friends are positive toward spirituality, but not so much toward a biblical faith.

In fact, much of our society believes that holding to what the Bible teaches is both irrelevant and extreme.

On every front, there are reasons to be concerned as you go about your life, working, raising a family, playing, and studying.

But we believe that God has called us to be more than concerned. He has not called us to be troubled. In fact, Jesus told us, ***[John 14:1] "Let not your heart be troubled."***

And instead of being troubled, He has called us engage as missionaries to our friends. He wants you and me to be His salt and light to a dark and tasteless world. His assignment is to do more than survive. It is to have a thriving, vibrant, contagious faith.

Daniel thrived in Babylon and today, our exploration of Daniel will give us two keys that unlock the door to his - and to our own - Babylonian success stories.

Six chapters...one sermon...

Over the past six weeks, we have seen some wonderful things from the first six chapters of Daniel's book. This morning, we are going to conclude by sprinting through the last six chapters.

If this seems to be a ridiculous exercise, relax. I am not aiming to provide you with a detailed verse by verse exposition of Daniel 7-12. (So, when we are finished and I have not done that, at least you'll know that I wasn't trying and failing.)

Here's what I am trying to do.

First, I do want to give you a sense for the flow of the second half of the book of Daniel. I want you to get the gist of what the prophetic section of the book is all about.

Today's study, on the one hand, is a tease, in hopes that what you see today from a high altitude flyover will prompt you to go back and explore Daniel's prophecies, to dig deeper on your own.

Two, I want us all to notice and embrace two themes that are glaringly rampant in these chapters. Frankly, we can't miss them throughout Daniel. But it is these two themes, I believe, that equipped Daniel and that will equip us to thrive in Babylon.

The first six chapters of Daniel were mostly narrative, with great stories.

At chapter seven, we switch from narrative to Daniel's recounting of a series of visions and dreams he received, late in life, about things to come.²

All of these visions are dated relative to the king under whom he was serving at the time. He received the first vision in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, the last king of the Babylonian Empire.³

Thriving by Faith in a Glorious God-Ordered End to History

² These sections of Daniel's book are referred to as "apocalyptic" literature. Similarly, sections of Ezekiel and much of Revelation is apocalyptic. We expect to see vivid imagery and wildly figurative language in apocalyptic, as here.

³ See the end of his reign, recorded in Daniel 5.

God-Given Visions of Things to Come

A vision of four beasts (Daniel 7)

The vision started off with a description of four fantastic beasts who rose up out of the sea. Meet the beasts.

[4] "The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it.

[5] "And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!'

[6] "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

[7] "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

This fourth, awful beast, suffered a "horn-ectomy" as three of the ten horns were ripped out. (v. 8) They were replaced by another, smaller horn which uttered "**great boasts.**"

Daniel wanted to know what these beasts signified and he was told that they represented four kings - they were not identified - who would rise to rule over kingdoms. (vv. 16-21)

When he asked about the fourth beast, he was told that it would be "**exceedingly dreadful**" and that it would wage war against God's saints and would overpower them...for a while.

That's vision #1. Vision #2 was given two years later, in the third year of Belshazzar's reign, and is recorded in chapter 8.

A vision of a ram and a goat (Daniel 8)

In this vision Daniel saw a ram with two horns (one of them was longer than the other). And this ram was destructive!

[4] I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself.

Then, a male goat appeared that had one conspicuous horn coming out of its forehead. This goat attacked the rambunctious ram and destroyed it.

The goat then became very powerful and boastful. But, its large unicorn-like horn was broken and was replaced with four new horns. One of those horns became prominent and it rebelled against God (v. 11 - ***“the Commander of the host”***) and desecrated the temple in Jerusalem.

Daniel heard that the holy place (the temple) would be left unrestored and trampled for ***“2,300 evenings and mornings”*** (the times for the daily offerings).

And just as he had done after receiving the first vision, Daniel asked what this vision meant. So, the angel Gabriel⁴ was told to explain the vision to Daniel.

Gabriel told Daniel that the vision pertained to the end times - and then he tied the ram to the Medo-Persian Empire (which was just barely future to Belshazzar) and the goat to Greece (vv. 20-21).

Then, Gabriel said that an insolent and deceitful king would rise. And we’d love to know who this king is. Believe me, there are lots of theories.

It may be that Antiochus Epiphanes, a king who lived in the second century, BC, is being referred to here. He “fits” much of the

description in Daniel 8. Or it may be that another ruler, even future to us, today, is envisioned.

But whoever the vision speaks of will oppose God’s people, will do damage to them, and will be an arrogant, boastful, violent ruler...for a while.

Chapters seven and eight have given us wild apocalyptic visions. What we see next, in chapter nine, is very different. The dating for what we find next is the first year of King Darius, the king who reigned when Daniel was delivered from the lions’ den.

A vision of “weeks” (Daniel 9)

The main thing recorded in this chapter is Daniel’s intense prayer of confession. He confessed his own sin and the sin of his people, Israel.

But after he had been praying for a long time and while he was still praying, Gabriel showed up again. He gave Daniel a prophetic glimpse of the future for God’s people, using the term “weeks” as a unit of chronology.

Gabriel said that there would be a total of seventy “weeks” for the future of Israel, each week representing a time period of seven years.

The first sixty-nine weeks will last from the time that a decree is given to rebuild Jerusalem (which King Artaxerxes gave in 444 BC) until ***[9:25] Messiah the Prince*** (that is, Jesus!) enters Jerusalem to present Himself to the nation as its king (which happened on Palm Sunday).⁵

⁴ We meet Gabriel in Jesus’ birth narrative (see Luke chapters 1 and 2).

⁵ Using a 360-day calendar (which the Jews did use), Jesus’ entrance into the city on Palm Sunday was precisely 69 “weeks”/483 years after the time of the decree to

Then, Gabriel revealed that (v. 26), the Messiah will be **“cut off”** (a Hebrew word often used to describe being killed), which I take to be a prediction of Jesus’ death on a Roman cross.

And that brings us to the seventieth week. There has been and continues to be much discussion about what Daniel 9:27 and the talk of the seventieth week is all about.

It is my opinion that Israel’s seventieth week is still future to us, today.

I believe that we are currently in a space between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks and that the seventieth week will be a time of great tribulation, a time when a terrible ruler will desecrate the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. This terrible ruler will perform abominations and will destroy holy things...for a while.

And this brings us to the fourth vision. It is the final vision and is given during the third year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia.

The vision of the end (Daniel 10-12)

All of chapter ten is a prelude to the vision itself. Read through Daniel 10 and you’ll see that Daniel has an encounter with an angel by the banks of the Tigris River. (It is not clear if this is Gabriel.)

As is often the case with angelic encounters, Daniel was undone. But the angel touched him, revived him, and promised that he would give him a vision of what would happen to the people of Israel in **“the latter days.”**⁶

rebuild Jerusalem under Artaxerxes. See Harold Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Zondervan. p. 138.

⁶ The angel told Daniel that he had just come from fighting another angelic (i.e. - demonic) power he calls **“the prince of Persia.”** The angel further commits (11:1) to be **“an encouragement and a protector”** to Darius the Mede. The opening verse of chapter 11 is often considered the closing verse of chapter 10.

What follows in Daniel 11:1-35 is about the most detailed description of some of the world’s history we find anywhere in the Bible - and it is history given before it happened.

Daniel 11 describes the four major kings of the Medo-Persian Empire (vv. 1-2) and the rise and fall of Alexander the Great (vv. 3-4). It speaks of Egyptian kings and queens (v. 6; kings of the south) and then describes the various Seleucid rulers (i.e. - Syrian, the kings of the north; vv. 10-20). He also describes Antiochus (IV) Epiphanes, a man who stole the throne, grew in power, and persecuted the Jews (vv. 21-35).

In this revelation, we find over thirty specific predictions that were precisely fulfilled in the centuries after Daniel recorded them.

It is these amazing, detailed, and accurate prophecies that prompted a third century (AD) philosopher, Porphyry, and others since him, to say that Daniel must have been written long after Daniel died. After all, how else could he have known this stuff.

Porphyry’s theory, though, has not stood the test of scrutiny over time. The most reliable biblical scholarship affirms Daniel’s authorship of the whole book, including these chapters that predict the future.

At the end of verse 35, though, there is a clear break in the prophecy with the words **“the end time.”**

The **“king”** referred to in the passage going forward is not the wicked Antiochus. It is another ruler, one who is yet to arise, but who will also be opposed to God and to God’s people.⁷

I believe that this **“king”** is the one we often refer to as the Antichrist, who will be active in opposing God’s plan prior to the return of the Lord Jesus.

⁷ Generally, those who do not hold to biblical inspiration see Daniel 11:1-35 as history written AFTER the fact because it is so accurate. However, they also often apply the words of vv. 36ff to Antiochus Epiphanes. Yet the description given in these verses does not at all fit what we know of his life or his death from history.

He will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above all. He will speak monstrous things against God. He will wage war against God's people and will *"set up shop" ([45] He will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion...)* in Jerusalem...for a while.

Now that is a lot or far-reaching, globe-trotting prophecy squeezed into the second half of Daniel's book.

They are prophecies of wars and persecutions, of kingdoms rising and falling, and of evil rulers having their way. But that isn't the whole of the messages these prophecies bring.

At the very end of each one of them, we hear a reassuring word from God that He's got everything under control. Our God reigns.

Lesson Learned: Our God Reigns

At the end of the prophecy about the fourth terrible beast who will *[7:25] speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One*, one called the Ancient of Days (a reference to God on His throne - vv. 9, 13) and the Son of Man (this is a reference to Jesus - v. 13) will put an end to him.

[26] "But the court will sit for judgment, and [the fourth beast's] dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.

[27] "Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him."

At the conclusion of the vision of the ram and the goat (Medo-Persian and Greek empires), the terrible ruler who opposes the Prince of princes *[8:25] will be broken without human agency*. God will put an end to him.

At the end of the revelation of the seventy weeks, which saw the seventieth week ruled by a man who will desecrate the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, performing abominations and making holy things profane, a complete destruction will be *[27] "...poured out on the one who makes desolate."*

And at the end of the final vision, which shows an anti-God, anti-Christ making war and persecuting believers, *[12:45] he will come to his end, and no one will help him.*

Each one of these visions ends with God on the throne. God's kingdom is the final kingdom. In the end there is no competition for sovereignty.

Remember what we heard from Nebuchadnezzar after God humbled him with seven years of insanity and then restored him to full health and to his throne. The king declared:

*[4:2] [God's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom
And His dominion is from generation to generation.*

King Darius said the same thing after Daniel was delivered from the lion's den:

*[6:26] [God] is the living God and enduring forever,
And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed,
And His dominion will be forever.*

And Daniel had been the first to say it after God revealed to him the meaning of the king's dream,

*[2:20] Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,
For wisdom and power belong to Him.*

*[21] It is He who changes the times and the epochs;
He removes kings and establishes kings;
He gives wisdom to wise men
And knowledge to men of understanding.*

Daniel did so well in Babylon because of his confidence in God's sovereign control.

Everywhere he looked in Babylon, he saw a mess. But despite the mess that was Babylon, his visions of the future assured him that God can be trusted in the present.⁸

The word that describes the study of future things is eschatology and it was eschatology that equipped Daniel to thrive in Babylon.

I believe that the same will hold for us, today. It certainly holds on a personal level.

Personal eschatology addresses what happens to ME in the future. What happens to YOU in the future.

Near the end of his life, the old Apostle John wrote, **[1 John 5:13] These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**

He said, “*know.*” Not “*hope.*” Your personal future is eternally secure if you have believed in Jesus. What a difference it makes when we remember that despite *this* hardship or *that* setback, our sins are forgiven.

We are forever a son or a daughter of God. We will never face God’s condemning judgment. Personal eschatology puts an entirely new spin on life here and now.

And our global eschatology is based, too, on what Scripture says about God’s sovereign control over history moving forward.

We will thrive in our Babylon when we remember that God knows exactly what He is doing in the world; that He is taking history toward a glorious end where Jesus will reign; and that despite the messes we see all around us, our God reigns.⁹

So, given that race through Bible prophecy, we have found one of the two themes that will enable us to thrive in Babylon. By returning to Daniel’s book and his life, we’ll find one more.

It is prayer. Serious, prevailing, consistent, passionate prayer.

Thriving by Prevailing Prayer

Daniel, the Pray-er

A serious confession of sin (Daniel 9)

I mentioned just a couple of minutes ago that the revelation of the seventy weeks followed Daniel’s prayer of confession. It is important that you know why he prayed this prayer when he prayed it.

He had been studying the Bible. Specifically, he had been studying the prophecies of Jeremiah. The lives of Daniel and Jeremiah overlapped, and, despite living in Babylon, Daniel somehow had secured copies of Jeremiah’s writings.

Jeremiah had written that God’s people would return to Palestine after seventy years of captivity.¹⁰

Scholars believe that when Daniel prayed this prayer, it was about 539 BC, and that’s pretty close to seventy years since the first deportation of the Jews into captivity (605 BC).

So, with the time for a return drawing near, Daniel sensed the need to pray. He knew that the ongoing sin of his people was serious enough to merit God’s ongoing judgment rather than the mercy of a return.

So, he prayed. Listen, though, to the spirit in which he turned to God in prayer.

⁸ J.I. Packer says that Daniel gives us the greatest presentation of God’s sovereignty in the Bible. Knowing God. “The People Who Know Their God.”

⁹ The word that describes the study of how things are all going to turn out in the end is *eschatology* - and having a firm grasp on eschatology changes everything.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 25:11-12.

[3] So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.

It would be a great idea to read Daniel's prayer in its entirety. As you read it, see this eighty-year old senior government official clothed in rough sackcloth, and covered in ashes. He is fasting as he pours out his heart to God for what he longs for - God's blessing on his people.

The prayer is a perfect picture of passion and desperation for God to do what only He can do. Drive to repentance. Rescue. Restore. Renew. Rebuild.

That's one picture of Daniel's prayer life. Here's another one.

Three weeks of prayer and fasting (Daniel 10)

Turn over one chapter and we come to the final prophecy of his book. This is the chapter that begins with the angel appearing to Daniel by the Tigris River.

Daniel had been praying and fasting and mourning for three solid weeks. Here is how the Bible describes his time in prayer.

[2] In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. [3] I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.

At the end of these twenty-one days, the angel appeared to him. Listen to what the angel says.

[10:12] "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. [13] "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; the behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia."

The angels' words here give us an unusual glimpse at what goes on in the unseen spiritual realm when we pray. Or, if I may be so bold, what goes on when we pray as Daniel did, with desperation.

God heard Daniel's prayer for understanding of what was to come in the future. So, He sent one of His angels to Daniel to give him the answer and the understanding he sought.

But this angel was hindered from making it to Daniel because of resistance from ***"the prince of Persia."*** Not the human king of Persia, but a ***"prince"*** - a demonic force behind the king.

God's angel wanted to bring Daniel the answer to his prayer, but this ***"prince of Persia"*** didn't want him to get to Daniel, so he engaged God's angel in battle.¹¹

And doesn't that put your prayer life in a different light...

When you pray, forces are unleashed in the spiritual realm that you'll never sense. Angels are sent with God's answers and are opposed by demons.

Daniel's prevailing twenty-one day time of prayer and fasting gave Michael, another of God's angels, an opening to come to the first angel's need so that he could make it to Daniel with the answer to his prayer.

Both of these looks at Daniel, the pray-er, are of an old man. But even as a young man - a teenager - Daniel was convinced of the need for prayer to God.

When in need, when need is answered - PRAY! (Daniel 2)

When the king ordered the deaths of all the court counselors because none of them could interpret his dreams, Daniel took prayer action.

¹¹ So, John Walvoord, in his commentary, and many others.

[2:17] Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah about the matter, [18] so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven...

Lesson Learned: Prayer Changes THINGS and US

Daniel was removed from all external “props” and still maintained a vibrant faith in God. That faith was fueled by consistent, fervent, passionate prayer.

Thriving for Jesus in our own Babylon will require the same devotion to God, lived out by a commitment to prayer that:

- Invites others to join us in the thrill of seeking God;
- Engages our fullest energies as we pour out our hearts to God.