

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church.com, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Daniel 1:1-7 “An Uncompromising Life”

Intro. This evening we begin a series of messages through the book of Daniel. This is really a great book of the Old Testament. It contains some of the greatest stories of the Old Testament, such as Daniel in the lions’ den, and the story of the 3 Hebrew youths facing the fiery furnace. Young people usually like the book of Daniel because this book contains stories of courage and faith on the part of young people. This book also contains some interesting and amazing prophecies. The book of Daniel is to the Old Testament what the book of Revelation is to the New Testament. If you are going to understand the book of Revelation, it is very important that you understand the book of Daniel.

There is probably no other book of the Bible that has been criticized as much as the book of Daniel. The real motive of the critics is their displeasure with the fulfilled prophecy of the book. They do not believe in God, and only God can predict the future the way the book of Daniel did. Also, the book contains some miraculous deliverances, which they do not want to believe. However, I have no problem believing any part of the Book of Daniel, because I believe in a God of miracles! I believe it is the inspired Word of God.

Now I want to give an overview of this book. There are two main sections. The first 6 chapters contain personal victories, as well as some prophecy. The first three chapters contain a series of tests: the test of a diet, a dream, and a test of worship. In chapter 6 we read of Daniel’s faithfulness to God tested in his old age. Chapters 7-12 contain mainly prophecy of the future, most of which has already been fulfilled. Do you realize that Daniel chapter 9 actually predicted when the Messiah would come, and Jesus fulfilled that prophecy? Then some of the prophecies have yet to be fulfilled, such as a coming world government and the rise of the antichrist. It is quite possible that our generation will see the fulfillment of some of these final prophecies.

By the way, I will be teaching from Daniel on both Sunday and Wednesday nights. I hope you will come to both. So let’s begin our study of the book of Daniel by looking at the first seven verses of the first chapter. The title of my message is, “An Uncompromising Life.” The first lesson that stands out has to do with:

I. THE COST OF REBELLION

When a nation rebels against God, they will pay a price. For centuries the kingdom of Judah had rebelled against the Lord. Often they worshipped other gods. They failed to obey God’s law. As a result, God’s patience was exhausted and they suffered the consequences of their rebellion, as we see in the opening verses of the book of Daniel. Notice:

A. Jerusalem Was Besieged – We read in v.1, “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” Back in this day and time, most of the major cities of a kingdom were walled cities. Jerusalem was also elevated above several of the surrounding valleys, making it difficult to defeat. So when it came to well-fortified cities, the way to defeat such a city was to besiege it, starve it into submission, or somehow break through the gates, or scale the walls. Imagine what it was like to be surrounded by

the greatest army of the world at that time! Their purpose was to force Judah to become a subject nation within their expanding kingdom.

God didn't bring judgment without first warning the people. So notice:

B. Judah Was Warned - This should not have come as a surprise to Judah. They had been warned about this attack in 2 particular ways. First:

1. By Word - God sent many prophets to warn about this, such as Jeremiah (36:30ff), and Isaiah (2 Kings 20:14). If I had time, I could show you many passages of Scripture where God warned Judah about the coming judgment. [See 2 Kings 24:2, 21:10-16; 2 Chron. 36:15-16]. Besides, God had warned about this kind of judgment way back in the book of Deuteronomy (28:25ff).

2. By Example - All they had to do was to look at the Northern kingdom. As you recall, Israel had a civil war of sorts and divided into two kingdoms. The Northern kingdom was the first to turn away from God to serve idols. And they were the most persistent in their rebellion against God. And so they were destroyed as a nation by the Assyrians over 150 years earlier. But Judah did not give heed to the lesson of their example. They ended up doing the same things that Israel did, worshipping other gods.

Do you learn from other people's mistakes? Some people go ahead and get involved in drugs, alcohol, and immorality, even though they can see examples of people whose lives have been ruined by such things. For some reason most people have a tendency to believe that they are invincible. Somehow, they will escape the consequences of their actions.

Though Jerusalem had survived previous attempts to defeat the city, we read in v.2 of our text that:

C. Judgment Came – There we read, “And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand...” Gen. 6:3 says, “My Spirit will not always strive with man.” After hundreds of years of trying to get Judah to turn to God completely and faithfully, God said, “Enough is enough” and brought judgment upon them. Whereas before God had protected Judah from invading armies, including the Assyrians, this time God did not deliver Judah from the Babylonians, but delivered them into the hand of the Babylonians as a judgment against their sin. The word translated “Lord” is *Adonai*, which speaks of God as supreme Master. The significance of using this name here is to say that, though outward signs did not seem to show it, God was the master of this situation. He is the sovereign Lord. It was neither Nebuchadnezzar's strength nor Jehoiakim's weakness that really decided the matter, but God's purpose being accomplished.

I wonder how patient God is going to be with America before He judges us as a nation? As we become more and more like Sodom and Gomorrah, how can He *not* judge us after an adequate time for repentance? And the book of Daniel predicts that God is going to say to this wicked world, “Enough is enough,” and He will send King Jesus to judge this wicked world, and establish a kingdom of righteousness and peace.

Now as we think about God's judgment upon Jerusalem, consider with me:

1. The Reasons for it

a) They Disobeyed the Word of God - When the Word of God is ignored and violated, divine judgment sooner or later is inevitable. Gal. 6:7-8 says, “Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap...” For years and years Israel disobeyed the Law of Moses. For example, they did not give the land rest every 7 years as God had

commanded. So God made up for it by giving the land rest during 70 years of captivity (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10) to make up for it.

b) Because of Idolatry - Israel was carried captive because of their idolatry and it is fitting that they were carried into the very center of ancient idolatry. They loved their idols, so God gave them their fill of them! The term for Babylon found in v.2, Shinar, is a term used for Babylon with the nuance of a place hostile to faith. It is associated with Nimrod (Gen. 10:9-10). This is a classic case of how God can turn something bad into something good. The captivity cured Judah's idolatry. Never again did they have a real problem with the sin of idolatry. They became strongly monotheistic.

2. The Shame of It - Not only was this judgment terrible for Judah, it was also a temporary disgrace for God. At the end of v.2 we read of Nebuchadnezzar bringing the vessels of the temple to the house of his god. Why would he rob the Temple? It was not just a matter of seizing valuables. You see, if you could steal things from the gods of a foreign power, it was supposedly proof of your greatness. It was reasoned that if a god couldn't defend his own temple, then you didn't have to worry about him. It was also a gesture to show that the god of the Babylonians was the victor over the God of Israel. However, in 70 short years God would judge Babylon. Babylon fell to a foreign army, something no one would have thought possible, because Babylon had become such a powerful kingdom!

Sin brings shame into our lives. Always remember that.

3. Youths Suffer for the Sins of Others – We read in vv.3-4, “Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish....” Here were these young people, who were hardly old enough to make moral choices, and yet they are already suffering for the sins of previous generations.

And so that is the cost of rebellion. Individuals and nations should heed the warning of the cost of rebellion. God is righteous and holy. We see here that He judges sin. Therefore, we should live in obedience to the Lord and His Word and avoid the kind of judgment described here. We have a great military, but if God chooses to judge our nation, no military can prevent the purposes of God from being carried out. Sadly, I see the weakening of our military, which could pave the way for judgment upon America.

Now the second main lesson of our text is this:

II. THE CHALLENGE OF COMPROMISE

As we have seen, a few young men were taken captive into Babylon. They would face the greatest trial of their lives, whether to compromise their Jewish beliefs and practices. An old slogan says, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Would they compromise, and adopt the Babylonian religion and sinful lifestyle? What would you do if you were young and carried off as a captive to another nation, with little hope of ever returning? Would you simply try to fit in the best you could, and adapt to your new surroundings, even if that meant abandoning your faith? I hope not. So notice first of all:

A. The Taking of the Hostages – We read in v.3, “Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles.”

1. The Purpose - The Babylonians did not destroy Jerusalem at this time. They did not want to destroy the city, but only conquer it, and make Judah a subject nation. They were in the process of building an empire. As long as Judah paid their taxes to Babylon, and went along with Babylonian law, they would be able to maintain their national existence and have some degree of autonomy. Besides, as Nebuchadnezzar was besieging Jerusalem, he received word that his father had died. So he returned to Babylon, leaving Jehoiakim, king of Judah, in power. But in order to insure Jehoiakim's loyalty, Nebuchadnezzar took hostages until he could return at a later date and complete his conquest. There would be the threat that something bad could happen to them if Judah rebelled. Furthermore, if the captives were cooperative, they could be used in the administration of the subject nation of Judah.

2. Their Criteria of Selection – They did not take just anyone captive. They were looking for young men who met certain qualifications. Here we see that when the world looks for people to fill the bill, it evaluates their physical, mental and social qualities, because that's all it can understand. The Babylonians had little concern for character or spirituality.

By the way, that's how most people choose their political leaders. They choose people based on their looks, their education and intelligence, and their ability to interact with people. Most people are not concerned with character or spirituality. But I believe Christians should be.

The high qualifications set down by Nebuchadnezzar are now listed in v.4:

a) Physical qualifications - We read that they chose "young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking...." They were to be healthy and without physical handicap, a pleasing appearance, particularly in the face.

b) Mental qualifications – Notice also they were to be "gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand...." Superior intellectually, superior in education, good students, bringing information together and making wise decisions. That three phrases are used shows the stress that Nebuchadnezzar placed on intellectual capacity.

c) Social qualifications – We also read in v.4 that they had to have "ability to serve in the king's palace...." They had to have the poise, the manners, confidence, and the social graces to stand in a king's palace and not come off like a klutz.

Young people, as you prepare for a job out in the world, what you see in v.4 is still true today. It doesn't hurt to maintain a good appearance, both in your face, body, and clothes. Get a good education. Work hard in your studies. And learn from your parents and others social graces and manners. However, I would add that what is most important is that you develop good Christian character and spirituality. That has eternal value.

3. Their Identity – To meet the qualifications listed in v.4, Nebuchadnezzar wanted hostages right out of the princely nobility of the land of Judah. Historians tell us that between 50-75 were taken hostage at this time. Four of the hostages are identified in v.6, "Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah." All four of their names are clearly Hebrew names. "Daniel" and "Mishael" both end with the Hebrew word *el*, one of the names for God; and "Hananiah" and "Azariah" actually end with *yah*, an abbreviation found in so many Hebrew names for Yahweh. Not many godly homes existed at this time; but surely some did, to account for fine young men like these. There was a great revival during the reign of Josiah, the father of Jehoiakim. Daniel grew up in the days of that revival. His parents must have been devout believers. The name Daniel means "God is my judge", Hananiah, "Yahweh is gracious"; Mishael, "Who is what God is?" Azariah, "Yahweh has helped." All four of these young men had God in their names.

I do believe that Christian parents should consider giving names to their children that reflect their faith. Pick a good name, with a good meaning and association. Of all things that you pass down to your children, nothing is more important than a spiritual heritage. Yet most children and young people today have names that do not reflect a Christian heritage.

Something else we can say about the identity of these young men is this: Daniel could hardly have been older than fifteen years, in view of his being able to serve as a leader in the Persian kingdom 67 years later (538 B.C.). It was necessary that the young men be old enough to be ready to serve in 3 years and yet young enough to learn easily and come to feel at home in the new cultural surroundings.

We not only see in our text the taking of the hostages, but also:

B. The Training of the Hostages - The young men were to be educated. This was already stated at the end of v.4, "whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans." They were put into an intensive training program; something similar to college. Of course, they had to learn a new language to effectively communicate in that part of the world to which they were taken. They were also taught the standard curriculum of that day, including Babylonian literature. Their training was to separate them from their previous Jewish culture. They were going to melt them down and remake them into Chaldeans. Now look at the end of v.5 to see why they received this training, "so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king." The word translated "serve" literally means "to stand." That term emphasizes a common posture of royal servants, who always stood ready to serve the king at any moment. However, Nebuchadnezzar, investing so much time and money in these young foreigners, had more in mind for them than merely to grace his court. They were to be educated so that they might later serve well in important governmental posts. It is reasonable to assume that those who would have done the best in their educational pursuits would have been those to receive the more honored positions.

What the Babylonians attempted to do is not unlike what many universities and colleges in effect do to young people today. Sending your young people today to a secular or liberal college or university is not always doing them a favor, especially if they are not spiritually strong. Though they claim to offer academic freedom, you are often exposing them to a brainwashing process. Today they are producing students that embrace some form of Marxism. This is not just true of colleges. The liberals in Washington have been working for years to make our public schools instruments of training our children in the liberal agenda and world view, though at one time our public schools reinforced Christian teaching. Sadly, even seminaries in our country that once held up the Word of God have now abandoned its authority and are guilty of brainwashing their students to believe that modern worldly wisdom is superior to God's Word. The world also uses the media to give us a steady diet of godless teaching.

We have seen in our text the taking of the hostages, and the training of the hostages. Now let's consider together:

C. The Attempted Triumph over the Hostages – Now to accomplish their purpose, they wanted to achieve control over the hostages, and loyalty from them. Notice what they did to them:

1. They Sought to Control through Obligation - These captives were treated quite well, with some of the finest food in the kingdom. We read in v.5, "And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank..." What a contrast to the time they experienced famine due to the siege of Jerusalem! Well, one of the most basic elements of brainwashing is creating a sense of obligation. This could be done by lavishly

providing for those in captivity so that their sustenance would be entirely dependent upon their captors. They were given the best food and wine. When a sense of well-being could be firmly established by abundant and delicious provisions, the captors would be conditioned to do anything necessary to retain that provision and to repay the Babylonians for their graciousness. The Babylonians wanted to seduce the hostages into being obligated to serve them, by lifting their standard of living to the point where they would never want to return to their past lifestyles. The king may have also been interested in their physical health.

We need to watch out, because quite a few politicians try to stay in power the same way. Through government hand-outs they stay in control, and the people lose more and more of their freedoms.

2. They Sought to Control them by Obliterating their Past – We read in v.7, “To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.” The kind of name-change indicated was not uncommon in the ancient world. Joseph was given the Egyptian name Zaphnath-paaneah (Gen. 41:45) and Esther’s name was originally the Hebrew name Hadassah (Esth. 2:7). But the purpose of the change was to make the young men more Babylonian. Also, it was done so that the hostages would forget their heritage and family “roots”. If they were eventually to make good governmental personnel, they should become Babylonians in their thinking and manner of life as soon as possible.

The world will always try to influence you to turn from God and embrace worldly values and principles. That’s why Paul said in Romans 12:2, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....”

3. The Success with Some - Apparently, out of the 50-75 young men who were taken as hostages, perhaps only 4 didn’t give in to this dietary brainwashing process, as we shall see next week. There aren’t very many people in the world who resist the world’s effort to brainwash them. These 4 young men are the only Jewish men named in the book of Daniel. I believe that is mainly because they stood strong against pagan influence. The corrupting influences of Babylon were probably too much for the others, and they were useless in God’s hands. But these 4 were young men God could use. Perhaps their victory was largely due to their godly parents.

What about you? Has the non-Christian world pressured you and influenced you to compromise your beliefs and practices? Or are you standing firm against sin and unbelief? Will you be among the few who remain faithful to the Lord in the midst of an ungodly generation? Well, we will learn more about that in the coming weeks.

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976); John MacArthur, Jr., *An Uncompromising Life* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text); John F. Walvoord, *Daniel The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1971); Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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