

# The Story: Daniel in Exile

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[ 0 : 00 ] So I was in Gull Lake, and my mentor, Gord Freider, is at Laurier Heights. I said, oh, I've got to prepare two sermons before I go to Gull Lake, or one while I'm in Gull Lake. And he said, don't say someone else's no for them.

And I said, what? That doesn't even make sense. No, it doesn't. But it doesn't, really? He's a pastor, though. You have to give him some grace. But I said, wait a minute, he's right. So he said, ask someone to take it off your shoulders.

Ask someone to take it on for you. All they can say is no. And he said yes. So I slept a little better during the week.

I got to spend more time interacting with other pastors and hearing their stories and sharing our story. And it was good. So blessings on you, my friend. Thank you. Yeah, don't clap.

I just couldn't think in time of some way to say no. No. I'm sure they teach pastors how to do that. I don't know how they do it. Certainly didn't work with me.

[ 1 : 02 ] So good morning and welcome to Bramer Baptist. It's great to see you all here this morning. Let me tell you the actual story. Pastor Kent was away at this retreat thing.

And so, yeah, so he asked me if I could preach. I couldn't think of anything to say in time. I should have said hockey or something. He also threatened to sit up here and make loud sighing and tisking noises.

That was his threat. And I responded by threatening to invite him to come right back up and share what he learned in detail at the retreat. So this is our kind of religious stalemate.

So we're currently in the midst of an extended sermon series called The Story. I don't know where to put my Bible. It's taking us through the Bible from the start to the finish, I think, is the plan.

Thereby hopefully grounding us in the Word of God in its entirety. That's kind of the idea. The key message that will be reiterated again today is that God is sovereign over the events of our lives and world empires, past, present, and those to come.

[ 2 : 21 ] God never abandons his people and never deviates from his ultimate plan. As we live out our lives, our stories here on earth, God's upper story is playing out just as it is supposed to.

Today we come to the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. So it's interesting, right? So for those of you who are named Daniel, first or second name, or maybe named, I know somebody who named their son Daniel, this is the namesake.

So book of Daniel. It's in the Old Testament. It's kind of right between the major and the minor prophets, so I don't know which one he counts as. It's around 605 BC.

Jehoiakim is king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar is king of Babylon. And I thought that Jehoiakim and Nebuchadnezzar would be two killer words in any upcoming Bible-based spelling bee.

Babylonians have besieged Jerusalem and taken away some of their brightest and best young people, including our stars, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

[ 3 : 40 ] And or to be renamed, who can do this with me? So what did Daniel, don't look at your Bible yet. What did Daniel get renamed as? Good. Good. It's one point for Vern. And Hananiah.

Good. And the last two are easier because they sort of sound a bit the same. Mishael. Mishak. Yep. And Azariah. Amazing.

Oh, that's where it came from. Veggie Tales. Well done. Okay. So I have to say the pastor's side of church seemed to do better than this side.

So you guys better start taking some notes here. Um. Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha. So therein begins the tale. Uh, for many exciting adventures would befall these four young heroes. Um, and I'm just really hopeful that the Marvel folks don't come across this story, turn it into their next installment, and mess it all up.

[ 4 : 46 ] So question, when you think of the book of Daniel, what stories come to your mind? Okay, don't say anything. We're going to try this side of the church here.

Let's try these people out. So book of Daniel, what stories come to your mind? Lions, Dan. Yeah, that's the kind of headliner. Okay, what else? Okay, we'll let you guys help. Pardon me? Yes? The furnace. The furnace. Yes. So if you're relatively new to the Bible or are not familiar with these dramatic events, the first six chapters of Daniel are a worthwhile and interesting read.

The rest of it gets a bit odd, and so you'll need to kind of dig down if you want to do that. But try the first six chapters if you're pretty new to this whole Bible slash church thing. It's quite interesting. It'll keep you turning the pages. It'll teach you lots about God's sovereignty. And about who's really in charge of things. We're going to focus today on three incidents involving a diet, a den, and a decision.

[ 5 : 58 ] A diet, a den, and a decision. I have selected these three events for the reason that I'm up here and you're not. So I can pick whatever I want.

And those are the ones that I picked. So first we're going to go with the diet. If you want to turn to Daniel, the Bibles are the heavier book in front of you. Kind of thick.

And I gave you a clue there. Daniel's kind of between the major prophets and the minor prophets.

The major prophets are the ones that have long chapters and the other ones are shorter.

Bucket Daniel. Daniel. And we're going to start in chapter 1. And we're going to start at verse 5. No, we're going to start at verse 1. You better give you some background.

As soon as I stop hearing pages turning, I'll know you've kind of got there. All right. So Daniel, chapter 1. And we'll actually start at verse 1.

[ 6 : 59 ] 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 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 and put in the treasury house of his God. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of the court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility.

The young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well-informed, quick to understand, qualified to serve in the king's palace.

He was to teach them the language, literature of the Babylonians. And now we'll go to where I was actually going to start. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table.

They were to be trained for three years. After that, they were to enter the king's service. Verse 8. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.

[ 8 : 10 ] And he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Skip to verse 12. Verse 15.

What is the point of this story?

It is not to promote eating vegetables and drinking water. Though this might, in fact, be a good idea. Certainly, all of our parents thought so.

The point of this story is that the combination of a sovereign God, an everlasting dominion, and an obedient servant is powerful indeed.

The second story is the adventure of the lion's den in chapter 6. So this is the den.

[ 9 : 31 ] And in this story, a group of lions also become vegetarians. At least for one night. So Daniel chapter 6.

And let's begin in verse 6. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing.

So that it cannot be altered in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be annulled. So the king put the decree in writing.

Now we're going to go to verse 10. Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home, he got down on his knees, and he prayed, giving thanks to his God just as he had done before.

Then these men went as a group, found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king.

[ 10 : 52 ] In biblical terms, these people are called rats. They went to the king. Did you not publish a decree? And the king answered, the decree stands. Then they said to the king, here's the trap door, Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing.

He still prays three times a day. Verse 16. So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel, chucked him in the lion's den.

The king said to Daniel, and this is very cool, may your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you. Little tiny seat of faith.

Verse 18. And the king returned to his palace, spent the night without eating, and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up, hurried to the lion's den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice.

[12:02] Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions? And Daniel answered, verse 21, O king, live forever.

Didn't forget his manners. My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight.

Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king. What is the point of this story? Not that everything always works out for the best as we see things.

Not that God always rescues us from all of our troubles. The point of this story is that the combination of a sovereign God, an everlasting dominion, and an obedient servant is powerful indeed.

That's the story of the den. That's the story of the diet. Finally, we come to the story of the decision, which is better known as the story of the fiery furnace, but I could not find another D word.

[13:19] So we went to the decision. There's no D word for furnace. There just isn't. If you think of one, then you're better than me. Daniel chapter 3 and verse 1. Story of the decision.

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. That's big. And set it up on the plain of Jura in the province of Babylon.

And the word went out to all the people. And I'm really going to shorten this because this gets really draggy in here. When you hear the signal, bow.

That's pretty simple. And just in case they hesitated or got a bit confused about that, whoever does not fall down in worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.

That seemed to clarify it for most people. But our young champions didn't bow. Verse 13.

[14:20] Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned our heroes and said, sort of, you've got one more chance. But if you do not worship the image this time, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace.

Then, this is such a cool verse, Then what God will be able to rescue you from my hand? It's clear who Nebuchadnezzar thinks is the all-powerful one, right?

Then the guys replied to the king, verse 17, If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it.

And he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

So, since King Nebuchadnezzar was known for his fiery temper, come on, into, thank you, I needed a groan or something, into the furnace they went.

[15:29] Verse 24, Then the king leapt to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, Wasn't it three men we tied up and threw into the fire?

And they replied, Certainly, O king. And he said, Look, I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.

Little growing seed of faith. What is the point of this story? That the combination of a sovereign God, an everlasting dominion, and three obedient servants, is powerful indeed.

What have you brought with you today? A wallet, purse, keys, iPhone, kids, and for some of you, a load of worries, of cares, of concerns, of anxieties.

Maybe you're in the midst of strife and trouble, maybe hardship or loss. In which case, you probably came to church today hoping for encouragement, hoping for hope, hoping for understanding, hoping for direction, and instead, and instead, I stand here and offer you three stories.

[17:03] And you might well ask yourself, What has that got to do with anything that I'm trying to cope with? And I will say a lot, actually.

Daniel was written a long time ago, yet as with all the Bible, it speaks clearly to needs today. How do you cope with troubles that arise in your life?

Not how do you, the big people, you. How do you cope? And maybe more important, how do you make sense of the troubles that come into your life, or maybe are in your life right now?

How do you understand that? So we all have lenses, we all have filters through which we see the world and all that happens to us.

These lenses, and we all have them, not just those who wear glasses, they help us create order and make sense of our lives, which we have to do, otherwise we go crazy.

[18:15] They help explain as well a really interesting question is, why can two people experience exactly the same thing and yet react totally differently?

How does that happen? I play hockey with a man whose son is dying. He's a good man.

He's strong. He's independent. He's capable. He's caring. And he's controlling. And he has no filter to help him cope with this.

So he's angry. He's angry. He's angry with the world. He's angry with people who don't understand what he's going through.

He's angry with a God he doesn't believe in. He has no filter to cope with what he's going through. I have a good friend who's starting to look like Pastor Kent up here.

[19:33] I have a nice... I have a friend whose mom has cancer, and she's one of my favorite people. She'll listen to this.

She wouldn't come. She's smart. She's teachable. She's strong-willed. She's type A. She's stubborn. So stubborn. She has no lens to make sense of what's going on with her mom's cancer. She has no lens to make sense of how helpless she feels. She has no... She has no filter to cope with that. We talk a lot about acceptance.

And that's a lens. Acceptance is a lens. Acceptance is a good lens. But it's tough to hold it in place by yourself. It's easier to go towards bitterness, anger, to demand answers.

Why is this happening? And why is this happening to me? Those are logical questions, right?

Acceptance is hard. How we think about what happens to us, the lenses that we use, determines, as we go through this stuff, whether we grow in character or grow in bitterness.

[20:58] We are, as humans, we are shaped by our trials one way or another. Daniel, in our story, could cope with the prospect of the lion's den because he had learned from his earlier experiences how to accept what came his way and how to trust his God with the outcome.

He learned that. So it's worthwhile to be a little bit interested in your own filters and lenses and to take time to reflect on them and pray about them whether or not you're currently in the midst of trouble or sorrow or stress.

It's really good to know because we are largely blinded to our own filters. We don't know a lot of them. They are exposed when we go through the stuff.

For those of you who believe that there's a God and that he's in control of the big picture, that he's sovereign over kingdoms of this earth, you have an extra lens option.

You have an extra filter choice. Instead of, why is this happening to me? Or what it usually sounds like is, why is this happening to me?

[22:26] You can walk towards questions like, what is God's purpose in this? And don't do it in a religious way. Try to kind of be open to that.

Walk towards it. What is God's purpose in this? What am I intended to learn through this? And how am I meant to grow? How am I meant to grow through this?

See, these open up new vistas for how to filter what is happening to us. And we need those. It doesn't make it hurt less.

Don't think for a minute that I'm saying that. It doesn't make it hurt less. It's not supposed to. We're supposed to hurt when we're going through stuff. It's weird if we don't hurt. But it does provide us with options and it provides us with hope.

helps us to get outside of our narrow, scary little world and catch a glimpse of the upper story. This one we keep talking about every week around here.

[23:28] A bigger world with a sovereign God, an everlasting dominion, and a peace that passes understanding. Amen. Do you feel challenged this morning?

I do. Have you gotten a bit more perspective? But do you feel challenged? Do you feel comforted? Do you feel like the pain and the struggles that you're going through are not for nothing?

We're being refined, my friends. We're being pruned for what God has in store for us in our future, for how God will work through us.

I want to pray for you. Father God, thank you that you are a good, good Father. That in this world, you've told us that we will have trouble.

And Father God, sometimes that trouble feels crushing. And we recognize that it is real.

[ 24 : 36 ] But Father, we also know with confidence that through your Son, Jesus Christ, who became a man who walked this very, very hard road of humanity just as we are, Father, through your Son, you get it.

You get it, and our troubles and our trials and our pain and our tears are not lost on you.

Father, help us to have perspective. Help us to see our lives through your eyes.

Help us to turn to you in times of pain. Help us to lean on one another and be there for one another because that's what this church thing is all about.

Father, we're not just here to sit passively by, but we are an intentional community that you have built to care for one another, to reflect you to a broken world and to be the agents of your story, your great upper story for humanity as we work out our own stories day by day.

[ 26 : 01 ] Father, help us to be encouraged by the power of your spirit. Help us to see our world through your eyes.

Help us to see opportunities that you have for us day by day and moment by moment. We ask for your provision in our lives, for your love to continue to surround and unfold us, for your peace to fill our hearts, especially in times when we are struggling and we are worried, Lord.

Help us to remember that your word tells us to cast, not just lay down, but cast our anxieties and our fears upon you because you care for us.

That's it. and so now, Lord, may your peace fill each one of us. May this message that you have shared through Noel this morning, one of perspective, one of recognizing that you are sovereign, you are in control, may we take that into our weeks, may we take that into our hearts, and may it change us according to your will.

We ask these things in your name. Amen.