

V. Crisis and the Christian in Biblical Perspective
“Foundations and Crisis”

Daniel 1

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The book of Daniel is a glorious narrative in God’s Word and Daniel 1 is a whole so that is how I will be giving it to you. We will be looking at another crisis in the next study also from the book of Daniel which will be in Daniel 3. God’s Word is the truth. Daniel 1:1–7 says *[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 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. [3] 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, [4] 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. [5] 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. [6] Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. [7] 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.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is a case study for us as Daniel is in crisis. Interestingly, Daniel in crisis is very much like all the other crises we have been looking at to learn how to view crisis from a Biblical world and life view with the confidence in Christ. We have seen in almost every case a national crisis and a personal crisis. It’s not different here. One morning in 605 BC Daniel along with three of his friends under their new names, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, are awakened to a foreign king with his army and all his power sweeping up King Jehoiakim and the vessels of the temple as they take away a select group of the nobility, the privilege, the advanced and achievers to the land of the Chaldeans, Babylon. The king’s name was Nebuchadnezzar. Likely Daniel, would have been about junior high age and that’s what happens on this day.

We will see the lessons we have already learned affirmed in Daniel and we’ll see something else. There is a national and personal crisis but Daniel will establish another crisis. In this text the word crisis and test are interchangeable. A crisis, like a test, is always there to reveal and refine. It reveals what you know, what you don’t know and what you need to know. As you learn what you need to know then you know how to respond to the crisis. Do you die in a pile of self-pity? Do you withdraw into passivity? Do you react with worldly, fleshly anger? Do you give up or give out? How do you respond to the crisis when it comes? How is Daniel going to respond to this crisis? When he responds he is going to try and do something.

If we were in England where our law system developed, there is a moment in a trial where a witness is placed in a boxlike area in the center of the room where they are sworn in before they give their testimony. That area is called the dock. As a witness you are put in the dock to bear testimony. Every time a crisis comes Christians are put in the dock, so to speak.

People are about to form ideas about our God by the witness we bear in the dock during that crisis, by our words, our response and what we do.

In Daniel's crisis we also find out that God is in the dock with us. Daniel is going to bear witness to God. What witness will God bear through Daniel's witness? Daniel's faithful witness becomes the occasion for God's faithful witness. I want to show you how Daniel gets to this point through the Spirit of God in Daniel 1 but I want to first remind you of the lessons we have learned from our previous lessons about the Christian in crisis.

Lesson one was from Titus 2:11–14 and it was to live sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present age. This is how God has called us to live. This Titus 2 passage is what I like to call our Amazing Grace hymn due to the fact it is through grace we are saved, instructed and disciplined. In other words, when crisis comes in a broken world the Christian responds sensibly, righteously and Godly. It is being prudent without panic. It is trusting God without tempting God. It is also livingly faithfully in order to live fearlessly. Does that ring a bell when you think of Daniel – faithfulness and fearlessness?

Fear is not a bad thing for it's a God-given emotion. It depends whether your fears are informed by your sins or your fear is dealt with by God's promises. Has the perfect love of God cast out the sinful use of fear in your life? That is what we're about to see with Daniel. His faithfulness will not only provide him with fearlessness but he is also setting up God in the dock to show His faithfulness through Daniel's faithfulness.

Lesson two we learned from a case study from Joseph's life and we saw in that lesson the multi-faceted dynamics of God's providence. When Joseph ended up in power his brothers were afraid of what he might do to them after their dad died and Joseph basically says to them 'what you meant for evil God meant for good.' In other words, God's providence and sovereignty is superintending the crisis. God was constantly at work in all that was happening in Joseph's life and his family's life. God's providence is full of multiple providences for in Joseph's time He was working in Egypt, Joseph, his brothers, Pharaoh, Potiphar, in the people of Israel and all of that all at the same time.

The third lesson we learned from Jesus when He was asked about two crises in Luke 13:1–5 and that lesson was the foundational and urgent message of repent or perish. Jesus informs us that every catastrophe that we see has a saturation of God's grace because every one of those catastrophes is an urgent call to repent or perish. The real question shouldn't be why is it happening to them but why isn't it happening to me? Jesus is warning us of the day God's wrath and judgment will fall on all who stand against Him. The crisis calls you to not only be right with God but to walk rightly with God.

The fourth lesson we learned was from Nehemiah 1. When Nehemiah heard of the national and personal crisis we learned the foundational and urgent call to fervent prayer. When he heard about all that was going on in Jerusalem and with the people of Israel he sat down, mourned, prayed and fasted. The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16). II Chronicles 7:14 says *[14] if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

Now we come to a fifth lesson from Daniel. As we go through Daniel 1 I will give you three things to arrange your thoughts around. The first thing I want you to see is through Daniel the Spirit of God is letting us know that there is a story behind, in and through the story. Growing up I enjoyed listening to a radio personality whose name was Paul Harvey. He had a wonderful voice and he would give a familiar story and then say 'now here's the rest of the

story.’ Then he would give you the details of what went on in the background of that story. That is what we have the privilege to know, not necessarily the details but in the story of life there is a story behind, in and throughout the story. That story is that God is working.

Imagine, Daniel wakes up and he is now a slave. He was a guy of obvious privilege, nobility and achievement and already at his young age known. How did the Babylonians know who to take if they weren’t known to be such people? So he has some reputation already along with his three friends and others. Now before the days out he’s a slave and he doesn’t have his temple or city to go to or walk through. He is now in a foreign city with a temple with foreign gods. This just didn’t happen out of the blue.

God has brought His people out of Egypt with His strong right hand. He took them through the Red Sea and destroyed the Egyptian army. He took them to Mount Sinai and gave them His law. His patience continued when He kept them for 40 years in the wilderness even when they were disobedient to bring them to a promised land. Then through Joshua God gave them the Promised Land and then were settled there with God-given judges. The people of Israel are a united Kingdom until the ten northern tribes rebelled against the Lord as they embraced other gods. God had said in His Word that when His people go astray that He would use a nation that is not His nation and use them to bring judgment upon His people. That is what He did with these ten tribes as the Assyrians come in and take over.

You would have thought the two tribes in the south would have learned their lessons but they also went into a downward spiral even though God visited them with five recorded revivals in the Bible. They also continued in rebellion against God so God raised up another nation and that was the Babylonians who came and defeated the Assyrians. Then in 605 BC the Babylonians come down to capture Jerusalem and will come back again for another pillaging of Jerusalem in 597 BC and in 586 BC they will come back and destroy the temple. Each time they take God’s people away into the Babylonian captivity. Daniel and his friends are taken the first time they come through Jerusalem.

In Daniel 1, Daniel and his friends are now in captivity as God is at work in their lives. When God forms, frames and fills His Word He puts all kinds of Biblical clues for us. We might think that Nebuchadnezzar took so much from God’s people but God gave them over into his hands. Daniel 1:2 says [2] *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God.* Then God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to bring some of the people and the vessels to Babylon.

Daniel 1:9 says [9] *And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.* Why did God give these special privileges to Daniel and his requests? It was because God gave him favor. Daniel 1:17 says [17] *As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.* God was the One who so gifted them with their intelligence, ability, maturity and insights. God is at work and there’s the story behind the story, in and throughout the story, but whether we are given the details or not we know by His Word He is present and working. God is working all things together for His glory and for the good of His people.

A second way to look at this text is that Daniel is looking and evaluation his location and vocation from a particular perspective. Daniel is applying a Biblical perspective to both his location and his present vocation. The Babylonians think Daniel is a slave and will train him for civil service but that’s not his true vocation, nor is Babylon simply his location. In Daniel 1:2 Daniel is brought to the land of Shinar – now this term has not been used for literally hundreds of years.

We heard this term back in Genesis 11 regarding the descendants of Noah. Some of the descendants of Noah did not do as the Lord said and took counsel among themselves. Genesis 11:1–4 says [1] *Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.* [2] *And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the **land of Shinar** and settled there.* [3] *And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.* [4] *Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, **lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.**”*

Instead of dispersing according to God’s command, they congregated according to their rebellion. God sends us to cities because that’s the congregation of man’s rebellion against Him and we’re supposed to bring the welfare to the city. The welfare is not what the city wants but the welfare is what God wants for the city. Yet they built this city in rebellion against God. I think they built a tower reaching into heaven for two reasons. One they did it in rebellion against God to congregate instead of disperse for God. Secondly, here is a man-made city state messiah stating they would make the way to heaven and not God will come down from heaven to make a way. I do think another reason is they are building something in case there is another flood from God that they can climb into and be saved. This is a place called Babel where God makes them babble to disperse them because they were doing organized rebellion with one language. This is your first statement of the kingdom of the antichrist – state supported messiah religion making their own way thinking God couldn’t get to them with judgment. Here is the antichrist showing up already.

The reason I point this out is because when Daniel arrives in Babylon he knows where he is. Where he has been placed is simply another phase of where they were. Here is an empire (Babylon) raised up against God, to be God and to take war against God’s people. This is an antichrist kingdom. Daniel had the information from Genesis when he came there as we get that clue with the mention of the land of Shinar, but what he doesn’t have is what we have and that’s Revelation 17 and 18 which says there is coming a Babylon the Great, the prostitute, who will be joined to the beast which is a government that is arrayed against God. We have the ability to not only look backwards like Daniel to see that Babylon is an iteration of Babel but we have the anticipation to look forward that God is going to bring to an end, Babylon the Great harlot. All in this kingdom will be ultimately destroyed by the judgment hand of God. Do you see how Daniel is looking at this, as a youth? I have junior high grandchildren. If tomorrow they would be swept away, how would they see it, view it, interpret it – that crisis?

We also see an evaluation of Daniel’s vocation as he sees himself as a residential alien on a covenantal pilgrimage. In the book of I Peter, Peter uses this language of being captured by Babylon and God’s people seeing themselves not as a commune within the hole but being in Babylon but not of Babylon. We are not home but we are in this world in the midst of the various iterations of the antichrist that stands against God many times with demigod like leaders, tyrants and governments that declare they are our free lunch/education/answers to our life as they unite with the apostate church. Yet we see ourselves as residential aliens, pilgrims.

We don’t see ourselves as defeated or withdrawn or isolated or simple reactionaries or rebels. On the contrary we see ourselves as ambassadors for Christ in a kingdom arrayed against Christ. We find ourselves ready to serve Christ even though that kingdom is attempting to do exactly what they did to Daniel. Let’s look at the rest of Daniel 1.

Daniel 1:8–21 says [8] *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. [9] And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, [10] and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." [11] Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, [12] "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. [13] Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." [14] So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. [15] At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. [16] So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

[17] As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. [18] At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. [19] And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. [20] And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. [21] And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego begin to go to work on the kingdom raided against God. First with isolation. Second with indoctrination. Third with education. They were put into the university of Babylon with a three year curriculum. Thirdly they had a designated vocation, in the king's service. Fourthly, they even renamed them with identification. Here they do what every servant of Satan, demigod and tyrant that raises itself up against God to be God. They place their mark upon them and then desire to control them.

How is Daniel going to see himself in all this? Daniel is going to see himself the way John instructs us to see ourselves where we are in the world but not of the world (John 17:16). Daniel sees himself the way Peter tells us this world is not our home (I Peter 2:11-12). We are pilgrims, residential aliens. We're living on a green card. In fact, we're one of the greatest benefits even to this kingdom that would destroy us for we're still an asset to it. We bring the welfare of God to that kingdom and that city but we are God's. We are not theirs. We are on a journey and we have a great commission from a great King. We have a great message, mission and King and we are ambassadors for that King.

Daniel is under the temporal control of Nebuchadnezzar by God's divine appointment but Daniel sees his location ultimately in the Kingdom of God and his vocation is a servant of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. That's why he makes the decision he makes. Why does he raise the flag over diet? Some would say this is the Bible telling us we ought to be vegetarians and to abstain from wine. Those are certainly valid choices for Christians to do but that is not what this is telling us and I can support this with many other passages of Scripture. If it is what he is doing then his Savior failed this test because his Savior drank wine and ate meat.

One might think Daniel did this because the food wasn't kosher. I think one could be getting close. The king's food was the best food and the best food came from the sacrifices the people brought to the pagan gods and that food was saved for the priests, the counselors and the king. Therefore you would be partaking of food that was sacrificed to idols. I think one could be on to something here but I think there is more to this story.

The story is in the phrase that is in one form or fashion repeated seven times. He would not eat the king's food or drink the king's wine. Daniel was not going to be owned by the king. One of the ways we do business with people is we take them out for a meal. You tell them you want to have a conversation with them and buy them a meal. There is no such thing as a free meal. That meal is being designed to put you into some form of obligation to them. So it is setting you up, making you obligated and it is designed to get something from you. The king's table was no free lunch/meal. Daniel decided this was where he was going to make his stand for God.

When young people go off to college I always tell them to do four things – find a church, find the campus ministry, find Christian friends and above all raise your flag. Let everyone know that you're a believer that is to be done immediately. Put yourself in the dock. Make yourself accountable. Daniel is in the dock. So here is your takeaway.

The takeaway is the real crisis in a crisis is how will you respond to the crisis; that will depend on how you view the crisis; and that ultimately depends on who is your King and Savior. Is your college your king? Is your sports team your king and savior? Who is your King? Who is your Savior? Isn't it interesting, how Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are not in abstract rebellion or cooperating, but their cooperation is a framed, qualified, modified cooperation. They have a cooperation that is guided and framed by an uncompromising consecration.

We're in the world but not of the world. To the king, you're temporal authority, we'll treat you as such but you're not the King. I've got another Table I'm going to sit at. I've got other food and drink I'll partake of for I am sitting at my King's Table and I will eat His Word. I will drink of His Spirit. I will build my life on Him and I know as I stand in the dock to be faithful to Him, He will be in the dock to be faithful to me.

Nebuchadnezzar didn't give them a job. God gave them the job through Nebuchadnezzar as God did His job on Daniel. Daniel shows that the Lord is at work in him. Daniel stand with this clear statement. He knew where to raise the flag. When the crisis comes, how will you see the crisis for that will determine how you respond to the crisis and the way you see the crisis is always determined by who your King and Savior is. It's His Table that you want to sit at, eat from, drink from and then God faithfully honors His people with His Word and by His Spirit.

Daniel 1 ends with a statement you would think would be in Daniel 12, the last chapter of the book. Daniel 1:21 says *[21] And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.* Daniel who received the top job as the advisor and counselor to Nebuchadnezzar will not only serve him and the kingdom of Babylon but he will serve the king of the Medo-Persians who defeats Babylon and that king is Cyrus. In other words, Daniel will be serving for 70 years which are in the statement he just made in verse 21. Daniel will be the chief counselor for two empires and five kings, because his King was the King of Kings and his Savior was his King.

Our King Jesus is our Savior. The Medo-Persians removed Babylon who removed Assyria but there will be another iteration of an antichrist kingdom called the Greek Empire. That one will be struck down and then there will be another one called the Roman Empire. Don't stop here. Go five hundred more years and a star will rise and counselors from this same land of Shinar are going to see that star. They will then go to the legacy of the counselor from five hundred years earlier who had brought the Word of God. There was no testimony of God in the Babylonian Empire until Daniel came.

They literally had thousands of gods in Babylon in the temples all over the place. There was no testimony to Yahweh but Yahweh got a testimony to Yahweh when He sent Daniel,

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Now they had a monument to the glory of God, not one built by a king but one built by the King of Kings and that's His people. Daniel will rise up to the place of importance and Daniel will import that Biblical literature that has informed him into the libraries of Babylon. Five hundred years later they will be reading from Numbers in the books of Moses and they will remember the same legendary Daniel who brought that Word and lived that Word every day, at the appropriate time would turn his face to Jerusalem. This man of Word and prayer, they then see a star and head to the same city, Jerusalem. There, these wise men will see the King of Kings.

I invite you to Him today. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the privilege to be in Your Word together. Thank You O God that even though there is a seemingly inexhaustible, constant iteration of kingdoms that stand against our God that claim to be God that take the place of God that demand the allegiance and adoration that only a God should receive, I thank You God that they are merely in Your hands and they are not inexhaustible. They will come to an end. Babylon the great harlot will be thrown down along with the beast through Christ our Lord. So Lord, as the crisis comes help us to be good citizens in the kingdoms of this world, to be in the world as a witness for Christ, but may the kingdoms of this world know as they see only One flag that flies over our hearts and lives – the cross of Christ. He is our King and Savior. If you have never come to this Christ who came for you, you don't build a tower to get to Him, He is your strong Tower. He has covered you. Would you today come to Him? If you want to talk with me about this Savior I would love to share with you how you by faith and repentance can join Daniel and the glorious saints of God and the pilgrimage on this world to the glories of the celestial city of Jerusalem – the new heavens and the new earth with Jesus who came from there to save you. Call me at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 if you want to talk with me about this decision. Father, lastly I would ask You for all of Your people who know You, may we be in this world and not of it. May we be residential aliens who bring the blessing of God by living for the glory of God through the power of the grace of God in this world but may the world see as we stand in the dock to bear testimony of Christ that our God is with us. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

Foundations and Crisis

1. Sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present age
2. Multi-faceted dynamics of God's Providence
3. Foundational and Urgent Message–Repent or Perish
4. Foundational and Urgent Call to Fervent Prayer

Foundations and Crisis

- I. The Story behind, in and through the Story
- II. An Evaluation of His Location and His Vocation
- III. A Residential Alien and Covenantal Pilgrimage

Life Takeaway

The real Crisis in a crisis is how will you respond to the crisis; that will depend on how you view the Crisis; that ultimately depends on who is your King and Savior.