



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

War of the Worlds

DANIEL: Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God

Daniel 1

Tim Badal | January 14, 2024



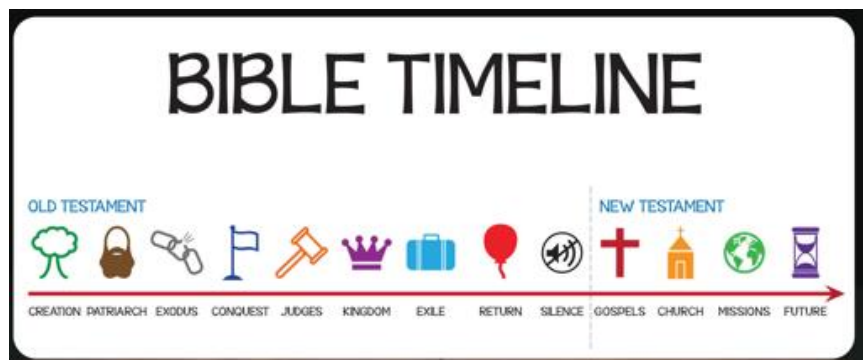
In 1898, H.G. Wells penned the words to his classic book, *The War of the Worlds*. It was unlike any book in his day. Back then, books were written about one country waging war against another, but never had anyone taken pen to paper to write about alien invaders seeking the destruction of the whole world. A kingdom, unseen and unknown to us, had decided to wage a war that threatened the very existence of our civilization. In the 1930s, this book came to greater prominence when it was adapted to the medium of radio. It began with what sounded like a real news report, warning of alien invaders. As a result, tens of thousands of people phoned their police stations and town halls, wanting to know what to do when the invaders actually arrived in their cities. They were scared to death. In 1953, the book was made into a movie, which also became a classic. It again came to the screen in 2005, this time starring Tom Cruise. There's something about the idea that we are at war with an unseen kingdom.

This morning we're kicking off a new series entitled "Daniel: Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God." In this series, we'll learn about two kingdoms that are waging war against one another. There is a kingdom that is not of this world which seeks the destruction of God. We'll see this play out in the life and times of Daniel. This alien kingdom sought to destroy God's purposes and plans for His people by sending them into captivity.

The question before us today is how ought we to live and respond in our day? As members of the Kingdom of God, how are we to respond when the kingdom, which in the book of Daniel is called Babylon, seems to be winning at every turn? As we'll see, the Kingdom of God is ultimately victorious over the kingdom of Babylon, the kingdom of the devil, the kingdom of evil and the kingdom of man.

In Daniel 1:1 we're given a time stamp for when those events took place. It was "*the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah.*" In order to help you understand this, here is a basic timeline of the Bible:

- We see that the Bible begins with creation in the book of Genesis.
- Next we're told about the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—their lives and faith journeys with God.
- Next there is the Exodus when the people of God left their slavery in Egypt. This is when Moses became prominent as their leader.
- Following Exodus there is a time of conquest when Joshua led the people into the



Promised Land. It was a season of great victory for the people of God, but then because they rebelled and began to worship the gods of the surrounding nations, there was a time of winnowing.

- This was when God raised up judges to guide them. However, the people were not satisfied with judges and instead begged God to give them a king, so they would be like the other kingdoms. The first king was Saul, then his rule was followed by the glory days of King David and King Solomon.
- About 400 years after David became king is the time of the book of Daniel, during the exile of the people into Babylon. This was about 600 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. The season of captivity actually lasted 70 years before the people of God were allowed to return to their land.

So going back to our reference in Daniel 1:1, we're told it was the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. Who was he and what was going on during his rule? For a number of years, God had been warning His people that if they did not turn from their evil ways, judgment was coming. Hosea had told them this. Jeremiah had told them this. Isaiah had told them this. And now Daniel was living in the day they had been warned about. We read this in Isaiah 39:6-7:

Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Do you see the precision with which the people were warned? Daniel and his friends actually lived out this prophecy, which was given by Isaiah years before it took place.

We're told in 2 Kings 23:36-37 that Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem for 11 years. It says, *"He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done."* There had been a long line of kings before Jehoiakim, most of whom were evil. But Jehoiakim was especially evil. He hated God and hated His Word. At one point a scribe was reading the Scriptures for some reason in the king's presence. The king heard what was read, had the scribe killed with a sword, had his body thrown into the fire, then he commanded that the scrolls themselves be thrown into the fire as well. Jehoiakim clearly hated the authority of God. God responded through the prophets by saying that He would not let this go unpunished, but that judgment was coming. He gave the people of Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon for 70 years.

So why would people today—2,600 years later—study this book? Why would we be interested in something that took place long ago and half a world away? With all our technology, learning and modernization, what could we learn from this book? I want you to see four lessons. The first lesson is the key, but many things can distract us from seeing this key lesson: **God is sovereign**. He is in control. He's in control of nations. He's in control of kings. He's in control of individuals. He's in control of every aspect of our lives. We live in in what may be the most anxious and fearful time in history. More of us are fearful and anxious than ever before. The book of Daniel will be your life preserver in stormy waters. It reminds us that no matter what the world and its kingdoms do, God is able to address everything, because He is in control. We also are told in Romans 8 that He works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. We can find peace knowing that we worship a God who is in control.

Second, we need to realize that Daniel's life is a reflection of ours, in that **we are becoming more and more of a minority in a secular world**. We have seen Christianity move from being thought of as a good thing, to being a neutral thing, to now being a bad thing. When I was growing up, being a Christian meant I would be respected, but that's no longer the case. Now when we tell others we believe in Jesus and the Bible, we are very often treated with disdain. So we have to ask: how do we respond to this new reality? How do we live as a spiritual minority in an increasingly secular world? Daniel will show us some creative ways to be upright and holy in God's eyes and still remain respectable in the eyes of those who disagree with us regarding our beliefs and worldview.

Number three, **the message of Daniel is prophetic** in nature. In fact, the last half of the book is going to talk about prophecies that we as a church believe are still to come. So this book is especially relevant because part of it is speaking about things that God has not done yet. So we want to know what God's purposes are and how we should respond to the events in our day and in the days to come.

Finally, just as in the days of Daniel, and even in the mind of H.G. Wells, today you and I are in the midst of a battle, **a war of worldviews and a war of kingdoms**. As we'll see in Daniel, this war of kingdoms was going on in ancient days as well. I want to

prove to you that this war today is just as big and fierce as it was in Daniel's day. Some of what he was facing we face today. We need to remember that the war isn't always at a fever pitch.

The war of the worlds involves a kingdom of rebellion.

In our text today, we'll learn some about the significance of the kingdom of Babylon. We know that it was ruled by king Nebuchadnezzar. In verses one and two, we read that he besieged Jerusalem, *"and the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God."* Notice what it says next. *"And he brought them to the land of Shinar."* We might think, "Well, that's just some place in Babylon. We really don't care." It's kind of like when someone talks about Sugar Grove or Aurora, we run right by it. We really don't even know or care where that is. But the Bible actually cares a lot about Shinar, because it has had an important role in human history.

Let's look at Genesis 11:1-4:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 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. 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."

This is the story of the tower of Babel—the place that later was called Babylon. The kingdom of Babylon where Daniel was taken had its roots in Genesis 11. This kingdom also has a role in the book of Revelation. It's a kingdom that specifically opposes God. It represents the kingdom of man and the kingdom of evil, empowered by Satan himself. Daniel had to deal with Babylon in his day, and we do as well in ours, so he can serve as an example of how we as Christians should live amidst the empire of Babylon.

Daniel was taken to the land which is now the nation of Iraq. King Nebuchadnezzar ruled there for about 40 years. He was known as the biggest and baddest leader in his day and his kingdom was the envy of the world. Babylon was the beacon of human achievement and worship. In fact, the hanging gardens of Babylon are one of the Ancient Wonders of the World. It was a place that represented the highest flourishing of humanity. But today, while only its ruins can be seen in the nation of Iraq, the spirit of Babylon is still alive here in America. It's alive and well in our world today. As we spoke about when we studied the book of Jude, the influences of Babylon can also creep into the lives of Christians, tempting them to turn the grace of God into sensuality.

So let's read about what Daniel and his friends encountered when they arrived in Babylon.

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.

If you followed VeggieTales, you'll remember these guys as Rack, Shack and Bennie.

Let's think about what the trip from Israel to Babylon would have involved. Using a modern map, we can see it was a trip of about 750 miles, about 1,000 kilometers. That's the distance between Sugar Grove and Washington, DC. Without planes, trains or automobiles, it took years to make that journey. It's quite likely that Daniel never saw his homeland again.

Why was he chosen to go to Babylon? He and others who were chosen came from the best homes, often from royal



families. They were the who's who. We're told they were *"without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning."* They had the social skills that equipped them to walk into any context, even in the palace of kings. They also had the ability to learn things quickly. If you want a picture of what they looked like, it's Pastor Tim in seventh grade. Crème de la crème, cream of the crop.

Why did Babylon do things this way? I want you to see that the spirit of Babylon did then what it seeks to do now. Notice a certain word in verse four: the word "youths." There was no mention that they selected older people, who might even have been wiser. Why was that? Because young people are impressionable. They can be morphed into anything a conquering nation wants them to be. They're vulnerable to temptations and the cunning schemes of others.

This kingdom seeks to reorient people.

In both Daniel's day and in our day, the spirit of Babylon seeks to reorient people. How? Well, the way it was done before is the same way it's being done today. The first step toward reorienting young people—and I want you young people here to realize you're on the front lines of this battle—is that Babylon and the devil want to create a distance between you and your parents. They want you to move away from what you have been taught by mom and dad. In Daniel's case, they were separated by 700 miles. The Babylonians knew that if mom and dad were out of the picture, then the things these young men had learned and treasured would be hard to remember and keep.

The second step with Daniel and his friends was to change their identities. We read in verse six, *"Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah."* Their identity was in their names and their connection to their tribe. They were part of the people of God. Judah was a respected tribe. In fact, their names specifically referred to the God they worshiped. Jehovah was their provider, their caregiver, the powerful one, the one who deserves all worship and praise. Their very names gave homage to the God of all gods. When their names were changed, their identities became references to the false pagan god Achu. The goal was that they might also change their allegiances to this other religion.

Brothers and sisters, we need to open our eyes to see the spirit of Babylon in our time.

When I was growing up, we never thought about our identity. We didn't talk about pronouns. Now, more than ever, names are being changed. Do you know that those who are most often changing their names are young people? Why is that? Because their names identify them and they no longer want to be identified with the name they were given. Their name has baggage. Their name connects them with this patriarchal understanding they see as repressive. Where does this come from? Sadly, it is the spirit of Babylon that's present in our day. And it gets worse.

They also changed their gender. Over five times in today's text we see the word 'eunuch,' which means a castrated male. There is a chief eunuch. These castrated males were of great service to the king.

Remember the description of the foreigners who were brought into the palace. They were good looking, smart, socially graceful. They were the class presidents. They were the student council chairpeople. They were the valedictorians. They were the ones the girls wanted to date. The last thing the king wanted was for those guys to create kingdoms of their own. So these young men were emasculated. Their desire for sexual activity was removed. They were made to be androgynous. They mis-gendered them. They physically mutilated these boys, who were probably teenagers, so they could never experience the abilities God purposed for them to have in the pleasure and procreation of marriage.

Today, we sometimes wonder where all this identity and gender stuff is coming from. It's coming from this spirit of Babylon and it's hitting our young people today. The same satanic force that was active in Daniel's day is alive and well 2,600 years later. We need to open our eyes to this. We need to pray for our young people, that they will understand what's coming against them and be able to stand strong in the face of it.

Once Babylon took away these young men's sexuality, they then started offering them all the best food and wine. They were offered the same delicacies the king himself ate. They were given the best of everything. A person wouldn't be allowed to stand before the king without wearing the best clothes and jewelry. They were offered everything that the world could give them. They were tempted to accept these things.

This kingdom seeks to rewire people.

Not only were these youths reoriented by taking them from their homes, they were also rewired. Notice in verse five that these youths were to be educated for three years. The Babylonians and the spirit of Babylon in the ancient world said it took three years to take a young person and completely reorient and rewire them.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard a Christian say, "I taught my children for 18 years in the fear and admonition of the Lord. I told them to follow the Bible. Then I sent them to the university, but in four years they came back completely different people." Why? Because the spirit of Babylon only needs three or four years to change young people, to make them rethink and second-guess what they had been taught, all under the guise of "higher education."

When we were looking for schools for Noah, our oldest, we went on tours of multiple schools. I told Amanda, "You stay with the tour. I'm going to cause trouble by leaving the tour." I wanted to know what the kids were like. If we were going to make this investment in our son's life, I wanted to know who I was handing him off to. I asked the students this question: "Now that you're here, are you closer to the faith of your parents or farther away?" Now these were all Christian universities and the students were honest with me. You'd be amazed at how many said, "I don't buy what my parents believe anymore." I got in the car and told Amanda, "We're not going to invest in that school."

The decisions we make have serious ramifications. We have to be careful, because the spirit of Babylon is alive and well. As Jude says, it can even infiltrate the church's institutions. I'm not trying to demonize that. I'm not telling you your kids should not go to college. Noah is going to college; Josh and Luke will be as well. These are important things. But we need to be more discerning now than ever.

Can I say something else? Social media, entertainers and other influencers have the spirit of Babylon in them as well, seeking to reorient and rewire young people—and old people as well. So we have a choice. In verse eight the text tells us we're either going to resolve to receive the kingdom of Babylon, or we'll reject what that kingdom offers. This is what Daniel 1 is all about. There's a kingdom out there offering you the choice to live in opposition to God's ways. You need to put yourself in Daniel's shoes and ask, "Will I receive that kingdom or will I reject that kingdom?"

Look at what Daniel chose to do in verse eight: *"Daniel resolved..."* That means he made a conscious decision *"that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank."* We're not sure why, but it seems there was something about the food being offered these young men that went against the Mosaic law. It might have been shared with the pagan gods. It could be the food broke the dietary rules and restrictions of the law. But for whatever reason, Daniel and his friends chose not to eat it, thinking, "I am not going to defile myself before God."

Let me pose this question to you today. Have you made a resolution in your heart, regardless of your age, "I will not defile myself. I will not defile myself at school, no matter what the popular kids say. I will not defile myself at work, no matter what the boss says. I will not defile myself in my dating relationships, no matter what my boyfriend or girlfriend says. I will not defile my marriage by going after other people. I will not defile myself with my money. I will not defile myself with my spare time. I will not defile myself with what I do with technology and media. I will not, I will not, I will not defile myself." Christian, have you made that declaration in your heart and with your mouth? "With God as my witness, I will not defile myself."

This teenager, Daniel, does that and I believe he made that declaration long before he was faced with this moment. Some of us think, "Well, I'll stand up for God when I have to, but I don't have to right now." Long before he was tested, Daniel resolved in his heart not to defile himself. Listen, you will never make the hard decisions unless you've first made the easy ones. Right now it's easy to make this declaration.

Notice that Daniel did not approach this bombastically. He didn't scream bloody murder on social media. Here's what he did:

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.

Let's pause for a moment to think about the wrong way to study the Bible. Not too long ago, a book came out that told people the way to lose weight was through the "Daniel Fast." Christians ate it up, no pun intended. That's bad Bible study, but it took over America. Why? Because we're more concerned about our physique than we are our spirituality. This wasn't written so we'd have a new diet in 2024.

What was going on then was Daniel had a strategy regarding how to live an upright and holy life while he was in Babylon. He simply asked, "Can we test this for ten days?" He was able to gain approval for his plan because God gave him favor with the authorities. Could it be that our prayer, while we're living in Babylon, should be that God would give us favor with those in authority over us? That might be a boss, a teacher or the people in our communities. Can we live such good lives as Daniel and his friends did that the people would see our choices as good, then maybe even bend their own rules?

What Daniel resolved in his heart was this truth: while we may live in Babylon, it doesn't mean Babylon needs to live in us. Jesus told us we would be in the world, but we don't need to be of the world. For 70 years Daniel dealt with these challenges, finding creative ways to live in this pagan society. But Babylon never lived in him. Why not? Because he chose not to live in a kingdom of rebellion against God.

The war of the worlds involves a Kingdom of righteousness.

What was Daniel's choice? He chose to live in a Kingdom of righteousness. That's what we're called to do as well. While we live in Babylon, while we live in a world of rebellion, we are called to live righteously, beginning with this resolution: "I will not defile myself." We've heard a lot about the kingdom of rebellion with Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. It seems to have had the upper hand. That's our experience in this world as well. It seems like the spirit of Babylon is dominating our world today.

But there's another Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Its capital city is heaven and its King is Jesus. Daniel said, "I want to be part of that Kingdom. If that means I have to die in this kingdom, if that means I have to suffer in this kingdom, that's okay. There's another Kingdom that's being built, not with human hands, but by God Himself, for His people. I know He's promised that for me, so I'm going to pursue that Kingdom."

What we must realize is that God's Kingdom destroys the kingdom of Babylon. It checkmates the kingdom of Babylon. In verses two, nine and 17, we see the phrase, "And the Lord gave..." or "God gave..." God was sovereignly in control. It was God Who handed Jehoiakim and the nation of Judah to the people of Babylon and king Nebuchadnezzar. It was God Who sovereignly gave Daniel favor with the authorities. It was God Who gave them learning and skills, as we read in verse 17. He gave them the standing they had. God is sovereign. He's in control. He's got this all figured out. So we can pursue this Kingdom of righteousness in this world of rebellion, but we need to understand a few things.

Living for God in a time of rebellion might put you in tough spots.

When we read the book of Daniel, we tend to think, "If I follow God, then this will be true. I live in a world of disobedience and rebellion, but if I stand up for what is right and biblical, then God will take care of me and everything will turn out great in the end." Well, you might hear this in Sunday School, but that's not the whole story. Actually, living for God in a time of rebellion might put you in tough spots. Let's face it. Daniel was in a tough spot. He was standing before a king who could kill him. But he was saying to the king, "Thanks, but no thanks." He's a foreigner. He's a teenager. He's got no army behind him. He's got no attorney with him. He's got nothing. He's in a tough spot.

Listen, standing as a Christian in a pagan world will put you in some tough spots. In our small group, we learned about people who had been put in some tough spots. probably not as difficult as what Daniel faced, but they had lost friendships. They had lost standing in their community. They had lost job opportunities because of stands they took based on what God says is right.

Living for God in a time of rebellion may mean suffering.

Following God may also mean suffering. We're going to see how Daniel was victorious in the end, but we would be remiss if we forget what got him there. Daniel had suffered greatly. Essentially he was trafficked. His childhood was taken from him. He lost his family and friends. He was probably abused and mutilated. He lost everything he owned and held dear. He could easily have gotten bitter.

Some of you have been following Jesus, yet bad things have happened to you. Suffering has come and you've allowed yourself to get bitter, but that's not what Daniel did. As we'll see throughout these 70 years that he lived in Babylon, Daniel never became

bitter. Instead, he got better. What God wants to teach us through Daniel is that we can do the same thing. But it's a choice. We have to resolve in our hearts that we're going to follow God in the good times and in the bad.

Living for God in a time of rebellion means relying on God to strengthen you.

Following God doesn't guarantee a good life, but here's what He promises: we can rely on Him to strengthen us. Daniel took a stand and relied on God. What were the results? God showed up. Let's read the rest of the passage:

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.

Then it says, *"And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus...."* Listen to me, friends. When we follow God, this is what we can know. Our lives may not be easy. They may not be pain free. But I can assure you that this is the promise of almighty God throughout His Scriptures: if we will remain faithful to Him, He will never leave us or forsake us.

Notice that Daniel was still standing after Babylon. After the chief eunuch, after the chief steward, after King Nebuchadnezzar, after the empire itself was long gone and King Cyrus of the Medes and Persians took over, God still had Daniel standing.

The Bible says if we will remain faithful to God, we will stand before Him one day and He will say to us, *"Well done, good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17). We will outlive any king or kingdom in this world. But what does that mean? It means we need to resolve in our hearts not to defile ourselves, but to be righteous in all we say and do.

Let me ask that this be our prayer today. Will you make Jesus your anthem? Will you allow Jesus to be your resolution—your conscious decision—that while you are living in Babylon, Babylon won't be living in you? The Bible says if we make this decision, Jesus will live with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. Wherever we go and whatever we run into, He will see us through it. Then one day He will present us without blemish or defect, but in great glory, before the throne of God. He will usher us into His Kingdom, the Kingdom that will never end, the Kingdom that will go on forever. This Kingdom will begin when He brings all other kingdoms under His feet. That's what God promises to those who, like Daniel, will make Jesus their all in all.