

# How to Live in Exile (Daniel)

**Big Idea:** To live well in exile, draw a line, hold a big picture of God, and believe that history is headed somewhere.

There's a thing in sports called the home field advantage.

You know what it's like to attend a game at home. At the Rogers Centre, most of the crowd is wearing Jays gear. At the start of the game, they announce the visiting team like they're reading the phone directory. When they announce the Jays, it's like they're announcing an all-star rock band.

The audience is very clearly on the side of the home team, and it makes a difference. A professor of computing and information conducted research and concluded that home field advantage exists, but may be declining. It probably has nothing to do with fans. It may have more to do with referee bias. Scholars seem to agree that the advantage exists, but it's on the decline.

Here's the thing that we need to realize. Christians used to enjoy the home field advantage in western society. We used to have favored status. We used to have a privileged position, but that's no longer the case. So what does it mean to play as the away team as the church, especially if we're used to playing as the home team?

What does it mean to not enjoy the support of the crowd? What does it mean when calls don't go in our favor? How do we adjust to being cheered against? These are important questions we need to answer, because I think it's safe to say that we no longer enjoy the home field advantage anymore.

# Life in Exile

That's why I'm glad we're looking at the book of Daniel today.

Daniel is someone who lived in exile in Babylon. That means he lived hundreds of miles away from the land that God had promised the people. In 605 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Judah. He brought Daniel and his friends to Babylon along with other captives from the nobility. Nebuchadnezzar tried to decapitate Judah by taking its most important people away.

Eight years later, he assaulted Judah again and brought ten thousand captives to Babylon. And then in 586 BC, he completely destroyed the city and brought more people from Judah to Babylon.

What would it feel like to live in Babylon as one of the minority? As we're going to see, Daniel and his friends faced tremendous pressure to assimilate to Babylonian culture.

- Daniel and his friends had their names changed from a Hebrew ones to Babylonian ones.
- They were given an education in Chaldean language and literature (Daniel 1:4).
- They were expected to eat Babylonian food and drink the wine, which went against their dietary restrictions as Jews.
- They were expected to worship the Babylonian gods instead of the one true God.

Every day, they faced the pressure to change to adapt to the culture. The pressure was sometimes so intense that their lives were at stake if they didn't compromise on their devotion to God and adapt to Babylonian culture.

It's not hard to see why we have something to learn from Daniel today. Daniel shows us what it's like to live faithfully even in exile.

And here's the good news: Daniel shows us that it's possible to succeed in exile. Like Joseph at the end of Genesis, it's possible, with God's help, to live with faithful obedience in a hostile culture and still enjoy God's blessing. It will come at a cost, but it's possible, and this should encourage us.

One of the most urgent tasks in the church today is to develop followers of Jesus who know how to live in exile. We need to develop the skill of living faithfully as God's people when culture is trying to pressure us to adapt and compromise our faith. That's why Daniel is such an important book for us to consider.

## Lessons from Daniel

Here are some lessons we learn from Daniel on how to live in exile.

### **First: Draw a line.**

Imagine the pressure that Daniel and his friends faced. As Alistair Begg [puts it](#):

*...their nation defeated, their temple destroyed, and now living in the most glittering and powerful city in the known world. They were enlisted in the service of the king of Babylon – and they accepted it. Their education was that of Babylon – and they accepted it. Their names were changed to be those of Babylon – and they accepted it. Their food was to be that of Babylon – and Daniel and his friends drew the line there.*

We read in Daniel 1:8: "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank."

What's amazing is how far Daniel and his friends were willing to go. They didn't resist a lot of their assimilation to Babylonian culture. They didn't skip their Babylonian literature classes. They answered their Babylonian names.

There are a ton of things we should embrace about living in a hostile culture. Our culture has so many things that are either neutral or good. The Bible doesn't promote the idea of withdrawing from culture. Go out with friends to restaurants. Go to sports events and concerts. Read great literature. Watch TV shows. You have the freedom to do all of this with a clean conscience.

But also know where to draw the line. Daniel is full of examples of this.

- In chapter 1, they refuse to eat food that would undermine Jewish dietary laws. They just resolve they're not going to do it.
- In chapter 3, they refuse to bow down to an idolatrous image, and they're sentenced to death for this.
- In chapter 6, Daniel refused to obey a royal edict not to pray, and is sentenced to death for simply praying to God.

Daniel and his friends adapted where they could, but they also knew how to draw the line. Again, Alistair Begg says:

*Given the pushback of twenty-first century secularism, you and I are going to face challenges. The crises will come; the moments will arrive when we are called to go with the flow of our culture rather than obedience to our God in the workplace, or on the sports team, or in how we raise our children, or in what we say from our pulpits, and so on.*

*Those crises will reveal what is inside us. Don't assume you'll stand firm in those moments. Equally, don't assume you will have to give in. Resolve now. Think through where to draw the lines you will not cross.*

How do you know where to draw the line? Resolve now that you will not contradict God's clear commands. That's why it's so important for us to get to know Scripture. Master it. Get to know what's optional and what's commanded, and resolve to obey what God has commanded no matter the cost.

But we have to go farther. We have to refuse to compromise in areas that violate our consciences. Romans 14:23 says, "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." What this says is that some things aren't sinful. For instance, wearing makeup isn't sinful. But if your conscience tell you that wearing makeup is sinful, then you shouldn't violate your conscience. R.C. Sproul wrote, "if we act against our consciences, we are also guilty of sin. The sin may not be located in what we do but rather in the fact that we commit an act we believe to be evil." So you've got to draw the line where your conscience tells you. It requires a lot of thought and prayer.

But as Begg says:

*We will be ready to wrestle with exactly where to draw that line, asking him for wisdom. At times the lines may be drawn in different places, but drawn they should be, and crossed they must not be. That is how we live faithfully in Babylon...*

So draw the line. Realize that there will be consequences. Daniel and his friends faced consequences. God delivered them, but their obedience wasn't contingent on God delivering them. Daniel's three friends said:

*...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. (Daniel 3:17-18)*

Adapt where you can, but know that you will have to draw the line somewhere. And when you do, be prepared to pay the cost.

Here's the second lesson we learn.

## **Second: Hold a big picture of God**

One of the books in my library is called [\*When People are Big and God is Small\*](#). That is a very good description of a problem that I have, and you might have too. Sometimes we face a lot of pressure because of how big people are. We see them. We feel the pressure of their presence. In those moments, God can seem smaller than them.

That's what we see in the book of Daniel. The pressures to disobey God come from powerful people. But one of the things that Daniel does is give us a big view of God. It tells us that the Babylonians aren't really in charge. God is in charge.

In chapter 2, Daniel stands before the most powerful leader in the world and prophesies that God is going to take away his kingdom. The rule of worldly leaders is temporary; God's rule is eternal. In chapter 4, the most powerful king in the world becomes temporarily insane until he comes to his senses and realizes that God is God.

*At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,*

*for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;  
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven  
and among the inhabitants of the earth;  
and none can stay his hand  
or say to him, "What have you done?"*

*At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me.*

*(Daniel 4:34-36)*

In chapter 5, another king is rebuked for his arrogance and removed from power. In chapters 7 to 12, Daniel has visions that point to the victory of God's people despite all ups and downs of history and the hostility against God's people.

One of the main lessons of Daniel is to draw a line. Obey God and trust him with the consequences. But another one of the lessons is to see God as big and people as small. Even the most powerful people are nothing before him. We need to see God as sovereign over every other sovereign, in charge of every other power, of working out history. We don't need to worry because God is in charge. Draw a line and hold a big picture of God.

There's one more lesson.

## **Finally: Believe that history is headed somewhere.**

Daniel is full of stories that are easy to understand. It's easy to understand the stories of courage exemplified by Daniel and his three friends. It's easy to understand a story about a king who goes insane until he recognizes God as God.

But there are parts of Daniel that are hard to understand. Daniel 7 to 12 is a set of three visions and a prayer. In case you find them hard to understand, you shouldn't worry, because Daniel can't even understand the first vision until an angel explains it to him.

If you read these chapters, it will be hard to understand all the details. Endless debates have taken place about who the visions refer to. Some people think that the visions are about events that have already taken place. Some think that they're talking about events to come.

One thing is for sure: we may not understand the details, but the overall big picture is clear. God will confront evil. God will rescue the world and his people. God will bring his kingdom to earth. We may not understand or agree on many of the details of the visions, but we can all understand and agree that this is the overarching message of Daniel's visions. And it should give us hope. God is working out his purposes in history.

I love Daniel 7:13-14:

*...and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,*



*that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.*

Who is this? We don't have to wonder, because in Mark 14:61-62, Jesus said that this refers to him. Jesus lies at the center of all history. The One who gave his life for us is the One who has been given dominion, a glory, and a kingdom, so that all people may serve him. His kingdom will never pass away. We can come to him and worship him in full confidence because of who he is.

The invitation is open to you today to come to this Jesus. You can be part of his kingdom. You can have confidence that you are his as he works all things out according to his purposes.

How do we live as the away team? **To live well in exile, draw a line, hold a big picture of God, and believe that history is headed somewhere.** And then we will live faithfully as his people even in the hardest times.

Lord, give us this wisdom and confidence. We thank you for Jesus who is not only our Savior but our eternal King. Help us to trust him and serve him with all of our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.