

# Into Babylon

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Date: 07 September 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our scripture reading today is from the book of Daniel chapter 1. That's 21 verses of chapter 1 in the book of Daniel.!

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. Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both the royal family and of the nobility, youth 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 Sheph Chaldeans. 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.

Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuch gave them names. Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

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. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

[ 1 : 42 ] 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 are in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age?

So you would endanger my head with the king. Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let her 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. So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was seen that they were in better appearance and faster in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food.

So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom.

[ 2 : 40 ] And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought into the chief of the eunuchs, brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And this king spoke with them.

And among them all, none of them was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Therefore they stood before the king. 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.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus. Let's pray. Lord, you promised to speak through your word.

So we ask today that you would do that. And you say in Isaiah 55 that whenever your word is preached and goes forth, that it never returns empty. It never fails to do what you want it to do.

So we recognize that truth today. And we pray, Lord, that you would open our hearts and speak to us. Help us to believe that the word of God really is what you say it is, the word of God.

[ 3 : 44 ] So we ask for your help. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We start today looking at the book of Daniel for the semester. And Daniel has six of the most memorable stories in the whole Bible.

And it also has six of the most difficult chapters to read in the whole Bible. And so when you read even this first chapter, you recognize very quickly this is a very ancient text.

It's a context that is so far away from us and so different from us. And yet at the same time, I hope you'll see today how relevant the book of Daniel is for us, especially in our moment.

So we're going to focus on just verses one to seven mainly today. And we'll start with the stories next week. So the first story of Daniel and his friends coming to Nebuchadnezzar's table.

That's next week. So today, let's just look at the first seven verses and try to understand the book of Daniel, especially as a whole. There are three little moments in these first seven verses, three words or little phrases, that if you get them, the whole book will open up in a way to understand what it's saying and also understand how relevant it is.

[ 4 : 58 ] And here's the three phrases, the three words. I'm going to give them to you now. Now, the first one is in verse two, and it's the land of Shinar. What is the meaning of the land of Shinar?

And then secondly, in verse seven, it says the chief eunuch gave Daniel and his three friends new names. And that's very important. And then the last one is in verse two and nine and 17, this threefold chorus refrain, and the Lord gave.

So if we get those and open those up a bit, you'll see the whole point of the book of Daniel, and it'll help us for the rest of the semester. So let's look at it together.

First, the meaning of this little phrase, the land of Shinar. We know, you don't have to be a Christian today or have grown up in the church to know some of the stories from Daniel.

You probably know about Daniel and the lion's den. You probably know about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace. These are very famous stories. But when you read Daniel very carefully, verse by verse, and really look closely at the words, there are depths to Daniel.

[ 6 : 07 ] Daniel's the writer, and he's connecting us to all sorts of other parts of the Bible as he writes and uses very particular words and phrases to do that. But here in verse 1 and 2, we learn that this is the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim.

And King Jehoiakim was the king in Jerusalem, in Judah, in the southern part of Israel. And the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim was not his best year.

Okay, so what happened? This great, powerful king named Nebuchadnezzar, who was the king of the power of the world that had risen, defeated Assyria, the previous great empire, and gone in 605 and defeated Egypt, the other great world power.

This king, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, he comes after beating Egypt at the Battle of Carchemash. He goes up to Jerusalem to take care of this tiny little city relative to everybody else. And when he goes there, he does not destroy it. So you may, if you know much about Old Testament history at all, you may know the year 587, that famous year when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, Solomon's temple, and leveled Jerusalem.

[ 7 : 20 ] But Nebuchadnezzar had actually come to Jerusalem a couple times before that as well. And the first time he comes is in 605, and he doesn't destroy anything. Instead, he goes and he ransacks it a bit, but he takes the professional class, 10,000 people in Jerusalem, and he ships them off to Babylon.

And then he also, we learn here, takes the gold and the silver from the temple of the Lord himself and takes it to the temple of Marduk in Babylon. And so he goes and he takes people and he takes property, and we'll come back to why in just a minute.

But when this writer, Daniel, describes this event in verse 1 and 2, when these 10,000 people are taking into Babylon, including Daniel and his three friends, the word that he chooses to use is that he brought them, Nebuchadnezzar brought them to the land of Shinar.

You could translate that as into Babylon. But he doesn't say Babylon. He says Shinar, and that's important. And it's because, it's important for this reason.

This word Shinar is an archaism. It's a very old word. And it'd be like going to JFK in New York to fly to Edinburgh. Maybe some of you have had that experience.

[ 8 : 38 ] And you go up to the front desk and you say, I'd like to get a ticket to Caledonia, please. Right? Now, some of you, I can tell, don't understand that because maybe you're not from here.

Caledonia is the old Roman word for this area, for Scotland. Right? It'd be like going and saying, I'd like to fly to Caledonia. Maybe you will know this a little better. It'd be like in tea and coffee coming up to somebody and saying, Good morrow, sir.

How fair thou. Right? That's Middle English for normal everyday greetings. But if you say that to somebody today, it would be weird. In the same way that this choice to say Shinar is strange. And the reason he doesn't say Babylon, he will later, but he says Shinar. If you're a reader of the Bible, you may know why. You may remember where this phrase, the land of Shinar, shows up. And it shows up in the book of Genesis. And in the book of Genesis, we have this moment in Genesis 11, verse 1 and 2, where it says, The whole earth had one language and the same words. [ 9 : 39 ] And as a people, they migrated to the east, and they found a plain in the land of Shinar. And they settled there, and they said, Come, let us build for ourselves a city.

And let us build its towers to the heavens and make a name for ourselves. And that, of course, is the Tower of Babel, Tower of Babel. And the Tower of Babel was placed in the land of Shinar. And the writer here is connecting us to that and trying to get us to remember that. Why? Because Babel in the land of Shinar is proto-Babylon. It's the first great city of Babylon. And here we're reading about the way Babylon, Babel, developed over the centuries into this great empire. And the reason I think that Daniel is using the word Shinar is because he knows that every Old Testament reader, and then if you read the rest of the Bible, you start to realize that Babel or Babylon becomes a great symbol throughout the whole Bible for the reality of the human heart set against the city of God.

From the time of the Tower of Babel all the way to this moment, Babel or Babylon becomes this great symbol for the truth of what's going on in the human heart. And that's why he uses this word. [ 10 : 55 ] He's trying to contextualize it spiritually and tell us where we are spiritually. And over and over again in the Bible, Babylon is used in this way, Revelation 18, 17, for example.

It's a symbol that says every single human heart ever since Genesis 3 has desired to build towers up to the heavens in order to save ourselves and actually slay God and bring him down. That's the meaning of the Tower of Babel. They wanted to make a name for themselves, and the goal was to build a temple all the way into the heavens to actually kill God, the real God, where creature would become creator and creator would be cast down.

And ever since then, in all the Bible, Babylon becomes a symbol for that reality in the human heart. Babylon was one of the great cities, one of the greatest cities that has ever existed.

And, you know, there's more myths about it than truths that we really know, but Rome is one of the other great cities that existed and still exist. And in the year 410, one of the great events that really shapes who we are today happened.

[ 12 : 07 ] The Visigoths came and sacked the city of Rome in the year 410, August 23rd and August 24th. And this guy named Alaric led the Visigoths. And people had believed that Rome was going to be this eternal city that never went away.

They had thought Rome is the hope of the world. And Alaric comes in with the Visigoths and he sacks the city. And the scariest part about it is that when he did that, he came for three days, two full days, three nights, and he plundered a bit, but he didn't set himself up as the emperor. Instead, he sacked the city and he just left. And he left all the Roman citizens behind. And one of the things that got said about that was the nobility of Rome said, the reason that this has happened is because of the Christians.

See, ever since Christianity came to Rome, people have stopped worshiping all the gods. And they're not paying tribute to the gods like they're supposed to. And so the gods are condemning us and judging us through the Visigoths.

But then the Christians also were afraid because the Christians at that time thought Rome was going to be the hope of the world. They thought, surely Jesus is going to turn this place into the city of God itself.

[ 13 : 17 ] And we're doing our work to make that happen. That's what they thought. And so St. Augustine, Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, he comes and writes this very famous book, thousand pages that you probably only ever read if you take some great text class in university or something like that.

And he had a thesis and he said to the nobles in Rome that were blaming it on the Christians, saying Rome is the hope of eternity. And to the Christians who were saying Rome is the hope of eternity, Augustine said there is no city of man, no city in this world, no nation that will ever be the city of God.

No great kingdom. And to believe that is just to inhabit the truths of Babylon, to have a Babylonian heart. In other words, a Babylonian heart is when you say, I'm going to take something in this creaturely domain, something that was created by the real God, and I'm going to elevate it and build for myself a tower with it that will get me to the heavens and will save me.

And another way to say it is the Babylonian heart or the Babylonian captivity that we all come into this world with is just the good old-fashioned word idolatry. And Babylon becomes the great symbol throughout the whole Bible of the truth of what's going on in our hearts and in every city, including our city.

That idolatry is at the center of every city of man, at every society, and that it will always be that way until the Lord brings the city of God. There's no hope in Babylon, there's no hope in Rome, and there's no hope in Edinburgh either.

[14:50] Every city is a city of man. And that means that the Bible comes and tells us, if you're a Christian today, Hebrews 3 and 4, 1 Peter 1, we are all in exile in this life, living in the city of man, awaiting, longing for the city of God to come.

And so the reason that Daniel, the writer, says Shinar is because of all that. Because at the heart of every city, at the heart of every human is idolatry, Babylon. We have Babylonian captivity in our hearts and in our lives, and that's what's going on here.

I need to move on. But at the very center of this book, I think probably the most important moment to explain this book is in Daniel 4, when Nebuchadnezzar comes out onto his terrace, and he looks out at the city of Babylon, and he says, Look at this great city that I built with the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty.

And then, of course, Nebuchadnezzar is cast down like a beast. And he's saying at the heart of every human being is that attitude. And the attitude that, the pride that says, I can build my own salvation.

And we'll come later to Daniel 4, and we'll learn that it's beast-like. It's beast-like. Secondly, the new names here. Now, let's focus in a little more tightly.

[16:10] That's a broad look. More focused here on Daniel himself. In verse 7, we learn that the chief of the eunuchs gave Daniel and his friends new names.

So here, Daniel and his friends are now in Babylon, and they're at Nebuchadnezzar's table in his courtroom. And if you just look for a second at the new names that they're given, it really helps explain what's going on really precisely in this book.

Daniel's name is a Hebrew name, and it means God is my judge. But here, he's named Belteshazzar. And in Babylon, they spoke the language Aramaic.

But in the court, they would often study in Akkadian, or use the Akkadian language, just like academics in Edinburgh for centuries and centuries use Latin more commonly. And in the same way, so Daniel here is given an Akkadian name.

And his Akkadian name means, Bel protects the king. So he's actually named after one of the gods of Babylon, Bel. And then Hananiah, his name is Yat means in Hebrew, Yahweh is gracious, the Lord is gracious.

[17:18] But he's renamed Shadrach. We probably know these guys far better by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego than their original Hebrew names. Shadrach means commanded by Aku, which is the moon god of the city of Babylon.

And Mishael, his name is translated something like, who is like God? Who is like the real God? Nobody. But he's renamed in Akkadian to the name Meshach, which is just who is like Aku, who is like the moon god Aku in Babylon.

And then lastly, Azariah. His name means Yahweh is my help, the Lord is my help. And he's renamed to Abednego, servant of Nebo, one of the other gods of Babylon. Now, Nebuchadnezzar's plan was not to go to Jerusalem and to devastate it.

It was not to go to Jerusalem and ransack it and plunder and kill everybody. Instead, his plan was to dominate the world. How? Annihilation by assimilation.

The goal was not to kill everyone. Instead, the goal was to assimilate Judah and Jerusalem into Babylonianism. And here's his great plan.

[18:32] In other words, the danger here for the people of God, the danger here in Babylon in the ancient world and for us today, is not so much being excluded by the city but being far too included.

It's not so much being pushed away to the margins as we often think about it. The danger that's being told about in the book of Daniel is being so included that you assimilate and eventually lose your faith.

And so that was the goal. Renaming in the ancient world was so important. And they're renaming them at the beginning of this three-year educational process into the magic occult of Babylon, hoping that they can assimilate them, send them back to Jerusalem, and capture all of Jerusalem through this process of assimilation.

And that means that when you come to this book, boy, this is where we see how relevant it is. This book is asking the question, how can a believer in the Lord remain faithful in Babylon?

How can a believer in the Lord, the true God, remain faithful in a culture of assimilation, acculturation in the midst of a Babylonian city? That's the question of the book of Daniel.

[ 19 : 43 ] And they were surrounded by polytheism and pluralism and idolatry of all kinds. And you can look up today, and if you're a believer, you can clearly recognize we are surrounded by polytheism and pluralism and idolatry of all kinds.

And the question is, how can you remain faithful as an exile in the city of man until the city of God comes, just like Daniel and his friends? Scotland, just like many other places across Europe, we know we say this all the time, Christianity used to be right at the center of most of the institutions of our culture.

And, of course, now Christianity has been pulled to the margins of our culture. And Christians, Bible-believing, gospel-believing, resurrection-believing Christians, are a tiny minority in our population.

And, boy, is this book not relevant. It comes and asks you the question, how do you stay, how do you live as a Christian in a pluralist, polytheistic context where idolatry is actually at the center of the culture?

But one of the things it's also telling us here is that living in exile, living in exile, back to Hebrews 3 and 4, back to 1 Peter 1, where Peter looks out and says to every person, every person that's a Christian, you're in exile until the city of God comes, you're living a life of exile.

[ 20 : 59 ] Living in exile for us, we need to, boy, we need to hear this, living in exile is not a time or season in our lives. It's the whole of the Christian life.

It's not to look out at the culture and say, well, boy, things used to be so much better than they are now. The Bible actually says that living in exile is not a season in which culture is not healthy.

Living in exile is the whole of the Christian life. There is no golden age. There is no time when things were great. Idolatry is always at the center of the city of man.

No matter how much Christianity gets into the institutions, it's still not the city of God, not the city of God that is to come. And so this book comes in whole and tries to say, how do you live with wisdom and hope and faithfulness in the midst of a lifelong exile that you've entered into as a Christian?

One of the things to see that's really important, I think, about how to read the book of Daniel is that in the Old Testament, before it was translated to English, it was in slightly different order, the books of the Old Testament were.

[ 22 : 06 ] And Daniel shows up, not in the prophets like we have Daniel here in our English Bible, but in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, before it was rearranged a little bit, Daniel shows up amidst the wisdom books.

And it shows up right next to the book of Esther. And so what you have in the Old Testament is Daniel and Esther, a man and a woman, showing you how to live a life of faithfulness, hope, wisdom in the midst of exile.

These two great examples. So Daniel is ultimately a wisdom book. And week by week, we're gonna see the wisdom of what it looks like to live in faithfulness and hope and wisdom in wisdom in the midst of this exilic life that the Christian leads.

So let me finish by giving you the first principle of wisdom that this chapter gives us. And we'll look at two more next week. And so the first is found in verse two, verse nine, verse 17, three different times in this passage.

It says, the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. So God, if you're a Bible reader and you've read the book of Esther, you know that God is not mentioned across the book of Esther, right?

[ 23 : 19 ] In the same way in the book of Daniel, God is not mentioned very often. So after chapter one, we don't see the name of God hardly at all. And there's only one time in the whole of the book

of Daniel that the covenant name, Yahweh, the name from Exodus three of God shows up in Daniel's prayer.

That's it. No other time in the whole book. And for that reason, when you come to chapter one and you see the Lord gave, the Lord gave, the Lord gave in the first story, and then very little mention of the Lord or God after that, the writer's trying to say, pay attention to that.

This is setting up something that you need to be aware of, the great principle throughout the whole of the book. And here's the first principle. When you open up this first story, it looks a whole lot like God and his people have lost.

His people have been scattered, taken into exile. They're being annihilated by assimilation. But even more than that, and only an ancient reader would really catch this, it says that Nebuchadnezzar took the silver and the gold from out of the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, and he brought it to the temple of his God, Marduk, a very evil deity in the Old Testament.

And in an ancient person's mind, when they read this, what they think is, if a culture, a civilization, that follows a certain God like Marduk goes and defeats another culture that follows a different God like the Lord and takes and plunders their temple and brings back the things that were devoted to the Lord, to the temple of Marduk, it's saying Marduk has won, Babylon has won, Nebuchadnezzar has won, the religion of the Israelites is lost.

[ 25 : 01 ] It's gone. It looks so much in this book like God's people and God himself have actually lost. And three times in chapter one, it comes in the midst of that context and says it's the Lord that gave, the Lord that gave, the Lord that gave.

And that means the very first principle of wisdom in a life of exile that this book is asking you to see is that it is the Lord that puts his people into exile.

It's the Lord that put you, Christian person here today, into a city that doesn't largely, for large measure, know Jesus. It's actually God that gave us this.

So in other words, it's asking us not to say, oh, the culture and lament it. There's truths there. We should do that and can do that in a way. But instead, this is asking us to see it is actually God who has brought the culture to the place where it is.

And he's in control. And he's the one that's raising up the nations and casting them down. And he brought his people to Babylon. And he put Nebuchadnezzar on the throne. And he's doing something in that that we don't understand.

[ 26 : 11 ] And so he's asking us not to sit around and merely lament the culture, but instead to realize God gave this to us and gave us to it. He gave us to this city. And we're here for this place.

And he has us here, what did Esther say, for such a time as this. Whatever he may be doing in the midst of a time where we say, we wish Christianity was the heartbeat of Scotland. But this is where God's put us in this moment, in this time.

And he's given this to us. Now, let me give you two things to do with this and we'll finish. This little phrase, the Lord gave, doesn't just show up here, but if you read across the Old Testament, there's lots of places to read about the Babylonian exile.

Ezekiel is one. Isaiah talks about it, prophesies it. But one of the places is in the book of Jeremiah. And in Jeremiah 28, we have this moment where lots of the people who had been exiled to Babylon are all sitting around the Kabar Canal.

You read about this in the beginning of Ezekiel as well. And the Kabar Canal is this canal just outside of the city of Babylon. And there they are and they're waiting and they're lamenting. In Psalm 137, how can we sing the Lord's song in this place?

[ 27 : 26 ] He's taken everything. Nebuchadnezzar has taken everything from us. How can we survive this? And so this prophet, Hananiah, back in Jerusalem, he goes to the people in Jerusalem and he says, the Lord has spoken to me and the Lord told me that in two years, Yahweh, the real God, is going to destroy Nebuchadnezzar and break his back, it says.

And he's going to bring all these exiles back to Jerusalem. And so he says, what we need to do is we need to write a letter to the citizens in Babylon, the people who have been exiled, and say, just wait where you are, stay at the Kabar Canal, don't get stuck in, he says, because it's only two years. And then the Lord will fix all this. He will bring the city of God. And Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 28, the prophet Jeremiah comes to Hananiah and he stands before the elders in Jerusalem and says, this is a false prophet.

And Jeremiah says, no, the Lord has spoken to me and said, the Lord gave, the Lord delivered us into Babylon. And then he gives this very famous, he gives us our marching orders.

Okay, very famous, Jeremiah 29, what does he say? For such a time as this, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile, so that's where Christians do today, from Jerusalem to Babylon, build houses and live in them, plant gardens, eat their produce, take wives, have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons, give your daughters away in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters, multiply there, do not decrease, seek the welfare of the city, seek the peace of the city where I have sent you, pray to the Lord for Babylon, for in its peace you will find your peace.

[ 29 : 11 ] What does he say? How do you live in exile? How do you live in a city dominated by unbelief? How do you live in the city of man where idolatry is at the very center of most of the things that we're all about in our culture?

He says, the Lord is in control, the Lord has sent you here, don't stay away at the K-Bar Canal, get stuck into the lives of the city, the lives of the culture. In other words, he's giving you this two-fold spirituality and he says, don't separate, instead seek, go to the very heart of the culture of the city and be there and be a part of it and on the other hand, don't assimilate.

Neither separation nor assimilation. So don't give your heart to idolatry at the heart of the city but go and be there and know and you should have lots of non-Christian friends.

That's what he's telling us and you should be right there at the heart of what's going on in our city. In verse 7 and 8, in verse 7 and 8, the ESV has veiled this just a little bit but in verse 7, it says, the chief eunuchs, in Hebrew it says, set the names of Daniel and his friends.

And then in verse 8, it says, but Daniel, not resolved, but set upon himself that he would not defile himself. In other words, it's saying, as soon as Babylon tried to assimilate Daniel, he was there, he wasn't going anywhere, but he set his heart.

[ 30 : 36 ] He was given a new name so he gave his heart back to the Lord again. So as soon as the culture tried to assimilate him, he said, I'm not going anywhere, but I'm going to give my heart to the Lord while I'm here in the midst of the heart of Babylon.

This twofold spirituality, neither separation nor assimilation. And it's coined in a very famous phrase. What is the Christian life? Be in the world, but not of it.

Be in the world, but not of it. Go into the heart of the culture, but do not be of the culture. Neither separation nor assimilation. And that's really at the heartbeat of the Christian life that we're being talked about here in the book of Daniel.

Daniel's a blueprint, in other words, for us. Esther's a blueprint. Boy, did Esther go into the heart of the culture, the king's court, marrying the king himself, right? Do you, friends, today, Christians in this room, are you in a state in your Christian life right now of either separation where your life is all about protecting yourself from the city, from the culture, from non-Christians?

Or, on the other hand, are you struggling with assimilation? Are you in one of those two spaces? And if you are, Daniel's invitation to you is to come this semester and see how you can rearrange.

[ 31 : 53 ] Now, we're going to get into specifics, okay? Not today, don't worry, of how to do that. What does it look like very specifically in a city like ours to do that? That's coming later. But this is a blueprint.

And I just want to say, say it like this. Do you know how much God wants to change you, change your life, renew you by sending you into the heart of Babylon?

He wants to actually change your heart, change your life, renew your soul by getting stuck into the heart of the culture. And in doing that, at the same time, is he not maybe using us as one tiny little expression of the city of God on earth to renew our great city, the city of Edinburgh?

That's exactly the paradigm that we see here. How can you do that? Secondly, second takeaway, the last one, how can you do that? But, how can you do that? The only way that we're going to be able to do this today, to be in the world but not of it, to not separate nor assimilate, neither one, is if we are willing to go out into our city and our culture in contemporary Scotland and never have an ounce of moral superiority.

Never have an ounce of it. In other words, the only way we can do that is we've got to look today and say, yes, the culture is Babylonian, yes, idolatry is at the center of so many of the things about our contemporary nation.

[ 33 : 15 ] It's always been that way. But we've got to go and say first, the greatest problem that I need to recognize and deal with is there's a Babylonian captivity in my heart and if the Lord, Jesus himself, did not come and rescue my heart out of Babylon, I would be in exactly the same place.

Never moral superiority. Instead, always on an equal footing, always saying, it is all by grace. We, in our Babylonian hearts, we build our little towers of Babel, we take things in this creaturely life and try to build our towers to the heavens and slay God.

That is, I know that's in my heart if you're able today to say it, that that's in all of our hearts and as soon, as soon as humanity tried to build little temples to reach the heavens to kill God, God the Son decided, we tried to ascend to the heavens so what did he do?

He condescended. We tried to go up and kill God so what did he do? God came down and he put the knife to his own throat. We tried to build towers that would reach him so he laughed and said, I'll come to you.

And Jesus, you know, how do we protect ourselves from ever thinking we are morally superior because we look at the cross and we say, Jesus Christ died for my Babylonian heart, my Babylonian captivity.

[ 34 : 41 ] Never morally superior. No. All by grace, through faith. And we say, that's what I want for my city, to know that. To know that. This is a book of wisdom.

It's a book that just gives perspective. And so, the last word I'll give to Daniel, in verse 21, the writer here says about Daniel, verse 21, and Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Okay. Daniel came. He's 15 years old when he comes to Babylon in 605. But then the writer, the first chapter says, but he was there until King Cyrus. That's 539 BC.

That's 66 years later. What is it telling us? It's telling you to see wherever God has put you today and your life in the midst of this exiled life that we're living, you may be in a very tough place today, right now.

I don't know where God's put everyone in this room, but right now, he's given you to something that's not easy, right? And it says here that Daniel outlasted Nebuchadnezzar.

[ 35 : 44 ] He outlasted Babylon. He saw multiple kingdoms come through this place. And here's a bit of eschatology that we all need today. And here it is. It may seem at times in our lives like the kingdom of God has lost, like the church has lost, like the people of God has lost.

The kingdom of God, the church, the people of God, the believer will endure. No matter how small it looks, no matter how lost it looks, we will endure.

Daniel saw multiple kingdoms come through. That's an eschatology. That's a vision of how God is going to orchestrate the whole of the end. He will endure his people to the end. Faithfulness, wisdom, and hope in the midst of exile.

Let's pray. Lord, we need your help to be faithful and not assimilate and give our hearts away to the city of man, the idolatry that's at the heart of our city because it's at the heart of every human heart. And so we look again to that today. We recognize it. We think before you of ways we've assimilated, of ways we've given our hearts away to sin and to little idols and little gods and to a culture that's driven us away from the truths of the Bible.

[ 36 : 58 ] And so we pray for this whole semester as we look at that truth. Would you rescue us today? Would you rescue someone today from Babylonian captivity? Set us free. Liberate us, oh Lord, we pray.

And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.