

Brainwashed

Daniel 1:1-7

Series: Unshakable: A Study in the Book of Daniel

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

I have been looking forward to preaching this series for a while. We're going to take the next seven weeks to cover the first six chapters of the book of Daniel. Chapters 7-12 are more prophetic in nature and perhaps we will tackle those chapters in a prophecy series down the road...team it up with the book of Revelation.

The first six chapters will be where we camp out and they are a historical narrative covering some of the highlights of Daniel's life and times living in a place called, Babylon.

Now, if you are a Christian or have been in church for any length of time, chances are you are aware that some of the greatest stories of the Bible are contained in these six chapters:

- You have the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace...
- You have the story of Daniel being thrown into a den of lions...
- You have the story of the mysterious handwriting on the wall...

We're going to look at all of these stories in detail AND we will see just as the sermon bumper noted that when our belief is tested...when your enemies rise against us...when certain danger stares us down...we'll learn by looking at Daniel and his friend's life how our faith can become unshakeable.

Part of the reason that I have wanted to preach this series is because it seems as if everything around us IS shaking. Here are just some of the news headlines from this weekend:

- *Deadly violence persists in Gaza despite mediator's hope for a truce*
- *US watches closely as Ukrainian Forces push into Russia with US provided arms*
- *Now that mpox is a global health emergency, will it trigger another pandemic?*

How about a bit closer to home...here in Houston:

- *Texas Children's Hospital laid off 997 in employees in job cuts*
- *Texas lawmakers are looking for ways to curb rising home insurance rates*
- *Chas McCormick's struggles part of bigger issues in outfield (okay...I probably shouldn't have included that one!)*

The point is...and this is just a sampling...you read these news headlines which admittedly are meant to grab your attention, but a cursory reading of what's going on in our world is shocking and if you are not grounded in your faith could leave you shaking!

And this is just what's going on from a socioeconomic and political standpoint. Think about the spiritual...talk about leaving you shaking.

We are now living in what is described by theologians as a post-Christian and some even say an anti-Christian world.

Illus. Cracker Barrel – This summer we had sent the twins to see their grandparents. I was meeting my mom for lunch to pick them up and if you are over 65 there's only one place to meet and that's the Cracker Barrel.

Don't get me wrong, I love me some Cracker Barrel especially that gift shop. They have everything in there and one of the little knick knacks they have are what they call these "Remember When" books. Have you seen these before?

This is one is from 1941. This is from the decade in which my mom and dad were born. Just listen to what has changed from the 1940's to now.

Illus. Remember When (Read sampling)

So much has changed...and it's not just the cost of milk or the price of a new home. In 1941 church attendance was considered the norm. Christianity was not only warmly embraced it was almost a prerequisite for being a part of the community – you at a minimum adhered to Christian values and embraced Christian ethics.

There's no question Christianity was the dominant influence in our government and in our culture.

- There was prayer in schools...
- There was nothing open on Sundays...
- The nuclear family was the hub of society...

A LOT has changed since 1941. In January of this year, *Pew Research Center* noted in article entitled: *Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe* – they found that 'NONE'S – those who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular when asked about their religion as risen from 16% in 2007 to 28% today.

They are non-religious. The article goes on to state: **“Most “nones” say they were raised in a religion, usually Christianity. Yet today, they tend to be disconnected from religious institutions. Not only have they shaken off religious labels, they also have largely shaken off involvement in churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious organizations. For example, fully 90% of religious “nones” say they seldom or never go to religious services.”**

So, what you have in a post-Christian society are people who are familiar with the teachings of Christianity but refuse to see them as authoritative to life.

They may even share in some Christian values and ethics, but never will it supplant their own preferences and seldom will it influence their personal decision making.

In fact, in a post-Christian world, Christian values may be fine and good just don't dare see them as superior or feel the need to share them with others.

The thought is, "You keep those personal views, private. Don't bring them to the office...to school...to the government. You can have them, but don't expect me to honor or respect them."

As one writer succinctly and prophetically put it: **"Eventually, a post-Christian society moves from assuming Christian values to ignoring them, to resenting them, to repressing them, and eventually to persecuting them. What was once Christian and is now post-Christian will eventually become anti-Christian. Where any specific culture is in that process is subject to debate."**

I'll let you determine where you think we are as a culture – are we post-Christian or anti-Christian – probably somewhere between the two here in America.

And that's why this study in Daniel is so important and why it will be so beneficial. These first six chapters of Daniel are going to teach us how to live in a God-honoring way when the world around us is living the exact opposite...promoting the exact opposite.

We're going to learn how we can have an unshakeable faith when everything around us *is* shaking.

I'm calling the message today: **Brainwashed**

Let me set some context for you as we jump into the scripture. Babylon is the setting for the book of Daniel. And it has some very interesting history from a biblical standpoint that we need to be aware of as we start this study.

The first glimpse we get of what would be Babylon is found in Gen. 11. If you are familiar with your bible, you will know this is where the story of what is called the Tower of Babel comes from.

For those of you not aware of this story, let me fill you in very quickly. In the beginning (that's what the word "Genesis" means) we see God creating man and woman. And he tells them at creation his desire for them is to be fruitful and multiply.

Their role was to "fill the earth and subdue it". And that's exactly what they do.

The problem is they chose to rebel against God and sin and so when they multiply and fill the earth, they are filling it with sinners who have a natural bent away from God. Every person that is born is born with a sin nature.

This is the essence of sin – we naturally desire to rebel against God. This rebellion is seen in the wickedness of people which causes God to flood the earth – this is Noah and the ark...and then after Noah's time...he has a bunch of descendants and guess what?

Because they ultimately all came from Adam, they are all born with a sin nature and the natural bent of the sin nature is to oppose God...rebel against God.

This rebellion is highlighted in Gen. 11, and I just want to read a couple of verses from there...this will help color in the context and setting of the book of Daniel.

Gen. 11:1-4 – “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 (you'll see this word again and just a spoiler alert – this is the origin of Babylon – this is where it started!) 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 (represented security and strength) with its top in the heavens (glorious and majestic), and (heres' the goal) let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

So, look at what happens here. These people in this place called, Shinar (i.e. Babylon – we'll see this in just a minute), the people want to build a name for themselves. They didn't want to build God's name, promote God's fame...they wanted to build a name for themselves.

This building project was to show their genius...prove their independence. And so, look at what God does.

Gen. 11:5-9 – “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. (Notice: God still had to come down...he's greater than their great big tower!)⁶ And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.⁷ Come, let us (reference to the Trinity) go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.”⁸ So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel (it means to confuse, mix, mingle – this is what Babylon means!), because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.”

Babylon was founded on the premise to exalt self over God. It's origin...written in its DNA is this desire to make a name for self OVER the desire of praising the name of God.

Babylon from the very beginning is about setting itself up against God...and while it starts here, we see this playing itself out into the future – just read Revelation 17-18.

Whenever you see the word or place of “Babylon” mentioned in scripture, if there were parenthetical marks out beside the name you would see these words in the parenthesis:

Babylon (lust for power, selfish autonomy, human greed, rampant idolatry, unbridled hedonism)

Babylon is godless in every way – it represents the very antithesis of anything godly and at the time in which Daniel lived, the ruler of Babylon is a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. Let's call him "Nebo" for short.

Now, "Nebo" was a brilliant military commander. He had been leading various military campaigns and he had led Babylon to be the world's dominant superpower – economically speaking, politically speaking, militarily speaking, Babylon under his leadership was at its peak!

Interesting little side note if you ever play Bible Trivia. Only one other foreign leader is mentioned more in the Bible than Nebo – and that's Pharaoh from the Exodus narrative.

Nebo has his eyes set on conquering Judah. If you remember, after the death of King Solomon, Israel is divided into two separate kingdoms. You had Israel to the North and The Southern Kingdom of Judah to the South – this is where Jerusalem was located.

Both kingdoms had horrible kings for the most part. They didn't follow the Lord. They made alliances with foreign nations. They worshipped false gods...and as a result the Lord judged them.

He sent prophets – people like Isaiah and Jeremiah to warn them that if they didn't turn from their ways, bad things were going to happen AND he specifically warned them that Babylon would one day overtake them!

In fact, just listen to some of the prophecies given to the people of Israel and more specifically to the southern kingdom of Judah warning them of their sin and eventual ruin IF they did not repent!

I'll just give you a few of the warnings the people heard through the years and they either didn't believe it OR simply chose to ignore it:

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.⁷ 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.”

THIS is exactly what we see happen in Daniel 1. It's crazy! 100 years before it happened, Isaiah was giving warning! Jeremiah – he's called the weeping prophet – why?

Because he saw Nebo coming! His entire book is essentially a warning of judgment and reasons for the impending judgment!

Jeremiah 5:15-17 – “Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. ¹⁶ Their quiver is like an

open tomb; they are all mighty warriors.¹⁷ They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; your fortified cities in which you trust they shall beat down with the sword.”

And this is EXACTLY what happens. By the way, I can't stay here because we've got to get into Daniel 1, but do you want to know who God ultimately blames for Israel's rebellion and sin? You want to know who God ultimately holds accountable for the faithlessness of the people?

A: Kings, leaders, prophets and priests! Let that sink in.

God judges an entire nation because its civic AND spiritual leadership is immoral and ungodly...wicked and unfaithful! The prophet, Jeremiah lays the destruction of a nation and its people at the feet of leadership that has no business leading!

They are not qualified NOR equipped...they are leaders who are in it for themselves and not the good of the people and the glory of God.

Just something to think about! Judgment falling because of faithless, fickle leadership. For Judah, the judgment begins in 605 BC. This is where we pick up in:

Daniel 1:1-2 – “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 (Babylon), 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.”

It was a normal practice in these days when an invading ruler would capture a people they would loot their religious symbols and the various idols of the people.

This is exactly what takes place here. Nebo enters the temple and because Jews didn't have any idols – remember that's breaking the first two commandments! So instead of idols, what they take were vessels from the temple – plates, silverware, cups...and he takes them back to Babylon and places them back in the “treasury of his god”.

Now, remember in that day to capture a city and a nation was to capture that city and nation's god. While it was a battle between dueling armies, it was viewed by the people as something

much deeper – it was a battle of the gods, and this loot was symbolic of victory. The Babylonian gods were greater than god of Israel and Judah.

Not only would the conquering nation take loot and resources and art, they would also take people and exile them...bring them into captivity and slavery and absorb them into their own culture. And that's what we see taking place with Daniel and his friends.

Now, most scholars put Daniel at or around the age of 15 years old when he is taken from Jerusalem. The book of Daniel covers 70 years of Daniel's life. We know more about him than we do any of the Old Testament prophets. On three different occasions in this book, Daniel is referred to as "greatly beloved" by God.

One commentator I read called Daniel the "Mr. Clean" of the Old Testament. He is an example to follow in that he seems to do everything right in the midst of some pretty intense circumstances.

The first of the intense circumstances is right here in the first seven verses...just put yourself in his situation! 15 years old. You are removed from your home and forced to leave your loved ones. Everything you know and that is familiar to you is changed in an instant!

You are forced to walk 700 miles to a place that is totally different than anything you have ever known, and you are enrolled at the University of Babylon against your will, and powerless to do anything about it.

Your teacher is the "chief of the court officials" – i.e. the chief eunuch and while scholars will disagree on this, chances are highly likely that Daniel and his friends became eunuchs...it was sort of a prerequisite to serve in the king's court.

And the makeover...the indoctrination begins. For three years they are educated in the ways of Babylon. They have to take:

- Literature class – read the Babylonian history
- Language arts – learn how to speak the language of the Babylonians

One commentator, **John Goldingay** wrote: **"The Babylonian wise men were guardians of the sacred traditional lore developed and preserved in Mesopotamia over centuries, covering natural history, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, myth and chronicle. Much of the learning had practical purpose, being designed to be applied to life by means of astrology, oneirology (dream research), hepatoscopy (liver of animals), and the study of other organs, rites of purification, sacrifice, incantation, exorcism, and other forms of divination and magic."**

They were indoctrinated and worse than the indoctrination was the loss of their identity. We see this in their forced name change.

We know that names in the Bible represented a person's character and spoke of their reputation and purpose. This brainwashing would not be complete without a thorough erasing of these men's identities.

Their Hebrew names identified them as followers of the one, true God. And yet in each of their cases, their names are changed to identify them with one of the Babylonian's gods. New names meant new identities meant new ownership because they were now serving new gods.

- Daniel's name goes from meaning "God is my Judge" to Belteshazzar which means "O lady, (wife of Bel god) protect the king"
- The name "Hananiah" means "Yahweh is gracious". It's changed to "Shadrach" which means "under the command of Aku (moon god)"
- Mishael means "There is no one like God" – it's changed to "There is no one like Aku"
- Azariah means "God is my helper". His name is changed to Abednego, which means "servant of the shining one" (another name for the Babylonian god of wisdom)

It was a renaming and a reeducating...it was meant to be demoralizing and demeaning. It was separation and indoctrination.

And don't miss the big picture here: In Babylon:

- We are going to change the way you think about yourself...
- We're going to target your identity...
- We're going to change your worldview...
- We're going to reorient you to our way of life by immersing you in our culture...

And in so doing, we will make you forget what you grew up in and those values that you had that came from that God that you worshipped...they'll be a thing of the past. And the brainwashing of Babylon will be complete.

Now, Church, here's the takeaway today: We are living in Babylon!

Babylon (lust for power, selfish autonomy, human greed, rampant idolatry, unbridled hedonism)

And Babylon wants to brainwash you...the goal today is to do to the Christian exactly what Nebo did to Daniel and his three friends all these years ago.

And I want to give you in closing out time today a big word of application that I think will help as we live and reside in Babylon...it will help prevent the brainwashing of Babylon from occurring in our life.

It's just one word. Ready for it? **REMEMBER**

See, the way Babylon works...it's all about the mind. If Babylon can change your mind...the way you think...it's got you. So, in Babylon we must keep our mind and: **REMEMBER.**

1. Remember God's sovereignty

Throughout this book, it's going to feel as if things are out of control. Daniel and his friends are exiled...they are thrown into a fiery furnace...cast into a lion's den. It's going to seem like things are turned so far upside down that God has turned his back and either doesn't know what's going on or doesn't care...and that couldn't be further from the truth.

In ALL of this, God is sovereign and in control. Take (v. 2) for instance. Look at it again.

Daniel 1:2a – “And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand...”

What seems out of control to Daniel and his friends is really just an illusion. It's not out of control at all. God is in complete control. And we need to remember this when in Babylon. God is in control!

We look around today and see an ever-increasing post-Christian, even anti-Christian in some ways world and we could be tempted to think that things are “out of control”.

Well, they may be out of control to us, but NOT to God!

There is not a thing happening in our world today that is taking him by surprise! He's not pacing in the heavenlies, wringing his hands and what we see taking place is NOT keeping him up at night with worries and concerns.

God is totally in control. Even when foreign armies invade and evil doesn't just appear to win, it IS winning – guess what? God is in control.

Daniel was 15 years of age when he was deported and exiled and probably castrated and made a slave in the king's court. He was an “innocent” bystander to the years of Israel's rebellious sin that got them into this mess.

However, God is working a plan. He's playing chess while everyone else is playing checkers and we need to believe this...and trust in him when things around us seem out of control. It will help us in Babylon “keep our mind” knowing that God is doing something.

We are to rest in and trust his sovereignty. We don't need to get worked up over something that God could be allowing.

Notice: Daniel from all that we know didn't get mad at God...frustrated with God...throw his hands up and abandon his faith. This doesn't mean he understood everything that was going on, but there seems to be a trust...as we'll see next week a resolve!

A resolve to trust god and realize that whatever happens, no matter how dark it gets – God is in control.

Remembering this will help tremendously as we make our way in and through the city of Babylon.

2. Remember Satan's strategy

Make no mistake about it, Satan is behind the city and what's going on in the city of Babylon. Am I allowed to quote Beth Moore? She's a local and she's written an incredible study on the book of Daniel.

Beth Moore – “Babylon aims to seduce. Posing as the beautiful life, she morphs into the current image of whatever worldly man and woman want it to be. She is popular. She is desirable. She is intoxicating. And did I say she is religious? Ah, yes. She believes in so much of everything that one would be hard-pressed to tell if she believes anything. To worship self is to worship her. To worship her is to worship her king. She is dressed for success, but underneath her gaud, she is a lifeless mannequin. A fake. A poser. Her prop is the devil himself.”

I mentioned up front Babylon...in scripture it always is the antithesis of God. And Satan is who is behind it.

Babylon is all about power...it's all about beauty...it's all about as mentioned making a name for itself over God. And if Satan...he doesn't have to deport us to Babylon, it's here!

Just look at what we value today: power, beauty, self – we're the selfie generation!

Satan wants you living in Babylon...it's the good life! In Babylon you have the best food and wine...you have the best education. It's all health, wealth and prosperity in Babylon.

You can get real comfortable in Babylon and in the process, you don't even realize you're being indoctrinated...your worldview begins to slowly change and your identity is subtly taken from you.

You wake up, and you're brainwashed...you didn't even realize it. That's why I say, remember Satan's strategy – this is it! He doesn't want you to even wake up to the fact that you are living in Babylon, and he'll make it so comfortable you never want to leave!

Illus. Russell Moore – Editor and chief for *Christianity Today*. He wrote a book years ago called *Tempted and Tried*.

In the book he quotes an article and research done regarding cows on their way to slaughter. I didn't know this, but high stress levels can produce hormones and adrenaline in cows that ultimately affect the way the quality of the meat in a negative way.

He goes on to write citing research: *“Workers shouldn't yell at the cows, and they should never ever use cattle prods, because they are counterproductive and unneeded. If you just keep the cows contented and comfortable, they'll go wherever they're led. Don't surprise them, don't unnerve them, and above all, don't hurt them (well, at least until you slit their throats at the end).*

Along the way, this scientist devised a new technology that has revolutionized the ways of the big slaughter operations. In this system the cows aren't prodded off the truck but are led, in silence, onto a ramp. They go through a "squeeze chute," a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother's nuzzling touch. The cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. There are no sudden turns. The cows experience the sensation of going home, the same kind of way they've traveled so many times before.

As they mosey along the path, they don't even notice when their hooves are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slowly lifts them gently upward, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, a blunt instrument levels a surgical strike right between their eyes. They're transitioned from livestock to meat, and they're never aware enough to be alarmed by any of it. The pioneer of this technology commends it to the slaughterhouses and affectionately gives it a nickname. She calls it "the stairway to heaven."

Babylon is centered on comfort...it's centered on YOU...and THIS is where the brainwashing and stairway to hell begins. So, beware.

Satan's desire is to make you forget what you grew up in...what you know to be true from God's Word and he is so patient in reorienting and reeducating you.

In Babylon, don't forget Satan's strategy of separation and indoctrination. He's going after your mind – this is the battlefield and if he can change or influence your thinking and worldview – about God, yourself and what matters for eternity...well, then he's got you exactly where he wants you.

We need to be soberminded and ever alert to the subtle ways the Enemy tries to lead us astray making us fall in love with the pleasures of Babylon.

We're going to see in the next few weeks how Daniel stood strong in the midst of the declining culture around him...in Bablyon. And I hope you'll be back each week as we learn how our faith can remain: UNSHAKEABLE.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.