

THE BOOK OF DANIEL
LESSON 2—NOTES
DANIEL 1:1-7
OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Israel's king Solomon died in 931 B.C. Solomon's son Rehoboam foolishly provoked the leaders of the northern part of the nation, and they split from the south. This division never healed. The ten northern tribes were now called Israel. The two southern tribes were called Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel existed until 722 B.C., when the Assyrians destroyed it.

Except for brief periods of revival, and despite seeing God's judgment fall on the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom of Judah continued down a path toward judgment and destruction. At this time Judah, was under the domination of Egypt after Pharaoh Neco had killed Judah's King Josiah. The people of Judah anointed Josiah's son Jehoahaz as king, but after three months Pharaoh Neco took him prisoner and removed him from power, replacing him with his older brother Jehoiakim who favored Egypt. King Josiah had begun a revival in the land but all the good that he had done was soon destroyed by his son King Jehoiakim.

A little over one hundred years after the northern kingdom of Israel was taken over, Judah was conquered by the Babylonians. King Nebuchadnezzar was not yet the king of Babylon but would become the king before the summer of 605 B.C., was over. His father, Nabopolassar, had been struggling with the Egyptians for control of the Middle East for several years, but at this time he was taken ill and entrusted his army to his son Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar displaying his military ability, soundly defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. When his father died, Nebuchadnezzar became king.

The point at which Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and took Daniel and the other captives was sometime between the battle of Carchemish and the event of his coronation.

Nebuchadnezzar must have followed the retreating remnants of the Egyptian army for at least part of the way to Jerusalem and then gone on to the city. Jerusalem was the first city to be

conquered in his overall campaign to take all the leading cities of the area for his domination.
(Daniel, Joy of Living by Doris Greig & A Deeper Look at Daniel by D. Connelly)

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

VERSES 1-2—In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along 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 he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

These verses give us the historical setting for the book of Daniel, including the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the first of three deportations. According to Daniel, the deportation of him and his companions occurred ***in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah***. Babylonian historical texts date this time as the late spring or summer of 605 B.C. (Daniel does not record the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon that occurred in 586 B.C.)

We are greeted with the Lord's great sovereignty from the very beginning of the book of Daniel, as we are told that ***Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand***. He is Adonay. Owner, Ruler, Master, Sovereign. It was not the military excellence or prowess of Nebuchadnezzar that brought the downfall of Jerusalem but was the sovereign will of God. God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to go against Judah in order to judge Jehoiakim and the sinful nation. These events were the fulfillment of hundreds of years of warnings from God to his people, delivered through his prophets repeatedly to open the eyes and hearts of the Israelites of the coming disasters that would occur because of their sins against God. They were warned to repent or face judgment. Moses also predicted Israel's captivity as a consequence of abandoning the Lord (Deut. 28:36-37). But the Israelites refused to repent and were carried off as captives to Babylon, the center of idolatry and one of the most evil places in the world.

Judah, the southern kingdom had been in spiritual and political deterioration for a long time. King Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) who was nothing like his Godly father Josiah, but known as one of

Judah's worst kings, was given into King Nebuchadnezzar's hand, ***along with some of the vessels of the house of God***. Some of these vessels would have been gold and silver cups, as well as utensils used in the temple ceremonies. Miller reminds us that "Hezekiah had shown the Babylonians these treasures one hundred years before (Isa 39:2, 4), and Isaiah had predicted that someday they would be taken to Babylon (Is. 39:6). Nebuchadnezzar appropriated only part ("some") of the treasures of the temple at this time; the rest would be taken in subsequent invasions ...These objects were seized because of their value (gold and silver) and as trophies of war (1 Sam 5:2; 21:9)."

Nebuchadnezzar carried these treasures ***to the land of Shinar*** (located in modern Iraq) and put them in the ***treasury of his god***. "Shinar" is seen in other places in the Old Testament and is the ancient term used for Babylon. It is associated with Nimrod whose kingdom was "*Babel...in the land of Shinar*" (Gen. 10:10), it became the place where the Tower of Babel was built (Gen. 11:2-9) and is where Zechariah prophesies evil will someday return (Zech. 5:11). Shinar is known as the place where idolatry was born, a wicked place hostile to faith and rebellious against God. Hamilton describes Shinar writing, "It is the land of the seed of the serpent, where God's enemies dwell."

To many, the fall of Judah looked like the victory of the pagan gods over the true God of Israel. Refuting this Wiersbe writes, "Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple of God and even took the sacred furnishings and put them into the temple of his own god in Babylon. Later, Belshazzar would use some of those holy vessels to praise his own gods at a pagan feast, and God would judge him (Dan. 5). No matter how you viewed the fall of Jerusalem, it looked like a victory for the idols; but it was actually a victory for the Lord! He kept His covenant with Israel, and He fulfilled His promises. In fact, the same God who raised up the Babylonians to defeat Judah later raised up the Medes and Persians to conquer Babylon ... How strange that God's own people didn't obey Him, but Nebuchadnezzar and the pagan Babylonian army did obey Him! So wise and powerful is our God that He can permit men and women to make personal choices and still accomplish His purposes in this world ...We worship and serve a sovereign God who is never

caught by surprise. No matter what our circumstances may be, we can always say with confidence, “Alleluia! ... The Lord God Omnipotent reigns! (Rev. 19:6).”

INTRODUCTION TO DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS

VERSES 3-5—Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of wisdom*, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king’s court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king’s personal service.

Daniel, in explaining how he and his companions arrived in Babylon, records that the king commanded his servant Ashpenaz *to bring in some of the sons of Israel* for training to serve in the court. Miller explains that “All four young men were from the tribe of Judah.” It is believed that they were from the line of the kings. Miller goes on, “Even if there are two classes, the likelihood is that Daniel was of royal birth. Josephus declared that Daniel and his three friends were members of Zedekiah's family. At any rate, these teenage boys were from families of high social standing.” Regarding the purpose of taking these captives, Baldwin comments, “A few choice hostages from the Judean court would weaken resources there, prove useful to the conqueror and reinforce Judah's vassal status” (Miller p. 60).

Nebuchadnezzar had a well-developed plan. Not only would he conquer Jerusalem and control it, but he would employ their outstanding young men for his own service. In choosing these young men for his court in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was accomplishing several objectives. He would train the best qualified men of the conquered nation to serve in his government where he could benefit from the knowledge they have of their own people and could also use their skills to strengthen his own administration. These captives could serve as hostages to help keep the royal family (still in Judah) in line and their training and detailed preparation might serve Nebuchadnezzar well in the later administration of Jewish affairs. As Ferguson says, “He was taking a long-term view of his defeat of Jerusalem. He knew that to overcome God’s people by

military force was not enough. If they continued to resist him, his endeavors to subjugate them would demand more and more of his resources. Instead of strengthening his position, he would have weakened it by creating additional demands on his own army. He must be able to employ Jewish resources for his own purposes if his victory was to prove worthwhile. So, he weakened Jerusalem's prospects by exiling the cream of its youth, and he prepared for the future by giving them a thoroughly Babylonian education. What better agents could he use in his future dealings with Jerusalem than the sons of Jerusalem's nobility and intelligentsia?"

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was that these citizens of Jerusalem would learn to live and think like citizens of Babylon. It appears that Nebuchadnezzar used several tactics to conform these men of God's kingdom to the ways of his own pagan kingdom. These strategies are worth noting because they are experienced by believers today through the *"schemes of the devil"* for *"our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Eph. 6:10-20).

ISOLATION-The first step in making Babylonians out of Daniel and his companions was separation from their homeland, family, and friends. They were isolated from the influences that would shape their lives and characters in the ways of the Lord. They were taken away from their public worship of God, from the teaching from the Word of God and from fellowship with the people of God. This would have been very traumatic and a shock to their everyday lives. Being separated from all that was familiar would make them vulnerable and thus, far more susceptible to the new ideas they were bombarded with. The hope of Nebuchadnezzar would be that this strategy would increase the likelihood of the rejection of their faith in God and bring about their conversion to the worldview of Babylon.

INDOCTRINATION- The Babylonians planned to indoctrinate the young men into the teachings of their culture and pagan religions. The intense three-year training for Daniel and his companions, was to separate them from their previous Jewish culture and environment and teach them *the literature and language of the Chaldeans*. This would most likely include, "the

study of Sumerian, Akkadian and Aramaic among languages and the extensive literature written in them, including the various mythological texts, as well as historiography, astronomy, mathematics and medicine. They would likely have to imbibe the ‘scientific’ omen texts ... astrological omens ... medical omens ... dream interpretation” (Davis p. 31). The aim of this teaching was not merely academic. It was to retrain their minds to think as Babylonians rather than Israelites. Brainwashing was to begin immediately in this ungodly world unlike anything these teenagers had ever known.

ASSIMILATION AND COMPROMISE- Converting these men of God, into followers of Babylon required a total immersion into the world of Babylon. While changing their minds, the Babylonians also wanted to change their lifestyles. The young men were *given a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank*. The goal was to entice them with the delicacies and privileges of their new life. King Nebuchadnezzar clearly meant to earn the approval and loyalty of these young men by seducing them to abandon their foreign ways and embrace Babylonian culture and paganism. Hoping that such an immersion would wear them down causing them to compromise, and eventually win them over to his side. As Ferguson writes, “The good life that Daniel was offered was intended by the king to wean him away from the hard life to which God had called him. It would encourage him to focus on himself and on a life of enjoyment. It would lead him to think of himself no longer as a servile Israelite but as a distinguished courtier ... Somebody in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace knew enough about the human heart to see that most men have their price, and that good times, comfort, self-esteem, and a position in society are usually a sufficient bid for a soul.”

VERSES 6-7—Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

CONFUSION- The fourth strategy that Nebuchadnezzar used to wean these young men from the truth and conform them to the Babylonian culture was to change their names. To make an individual take on a new name shows complete authority over that person. As MacArthur writes, “They wanted to give them names that identified them with the Chaldean culture and

would be a part of the disposing of their Jewish heritage.” Nebuchadnezzar’s plan was to establish his authority over the young men of Judah, with the intent to confuse and reorient them away from God and toward the pagan gods of their new home.

It was not uncommon that Nebuchadnezzar gave foreign names to the Jewish men. For example, Joseph was given an Egyptian name by Pharaoh (Gen. 41:45), and Hadassah is known by her foreign name, Esther (Esth. 2:7). However, the renaming shows that these young men were now under the rule and authority of the Babylonians.

<u>HEBREW NAME</u>	<u>BABYLONIAN NAME</u>
Daniel: God is my judge.	Belteshazzar: Bel (Marduk), protect his life (the chief god).
Hananiah: Yahweh is gracious.	Shadrach: Under the command of Aku (moon god).
Mishael: Who is what God is?	Meshach: Who is what Aku is?
Azariah: Yahweh is my helper.	Abednego: Servant of Nego (god of learning).

The change in the names of Daniel and his three friends focuses attention on the meaning of both their Hebrew and Babylonian names. It is significant to note that their Hebrew names indicate their relationship to the God of Israel, and this suggests devout parents. MacArthur writes, “By piecing together evidence from the biblical record we can conclude that Daniel likely grew up in a godly home, his parents having been impacted by the spiritual revival and cultural reforms spearheaded by King Josiah.”

WHO IS DANIEL?

Daniel as a teenager was sent by God to Babylon. He was a man of great spiritual commitment. He was courageous, bold, and confident in who he was as a child of God. He was a prayer warrior, uncompromising in his faith, with *“no negligence or corruption to be found in him”* (Dan. 6:4). Daniel was God’s man in an evil pagan world and a beautiful example of Godliness and virtue. An amazing testimony to Daniel comes from the priest Ezekiel. Daniel would have been about 50 years old when Ezekiel wrote the book of Ezekiel. In his writing he mentions

Daniel three times (Ez. 14:14,20; 28:3). In writing about three righteous men, Ezekiel cites Noah, Daniel, and Job. Daniel who is still alive is put in the middle of two pillars of God. Daniel must have been an astoundingly wise, faithful, and Godly man to be written about by a contemporary.

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