

Lesson 3

Last week we finished our introduction, and we also finished verse 1. We looked at the history that led up to the event we saw in verse 1, and we looked at the history of Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim.

Daniel 1:2

2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

Verse 2 begins by describing what happened when Nebuchadnezzar initially besieged Jerusalem. He was given Jehoiakim, which means that Jehoiakim became his vassal, and Nebuchadnezzar was given temple treasures and, as we will see in a moment, hostages, including Daniel.

Verse 2 says that these were taken to the land of Shinar? What is that?

Genesis 11:2 tells us that the tower of Babel was built in the land of Shinar. In Genesis 11:9, we read: "Therefore is the name of it [the city] called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth." Genesis 10:10 likewise tells us that Babel was a city in the land of Shinar. That city later became Babylon.

As we study Daniel, we will often pause to consider the history of a city, a nation, or a king. Let's briefly do that with Babylon, which will be central to our study of Daniel.

Babylon flourished for thousands of years, starting at least as early as 3200 BC and continuing through 323 BC when Alexander the Great died there, having captured the city in 331 BC.

We need to keep in mind that Babylon is a city rather than a nation, although Babylon is sometimes used as a synonym for Chaldea, the nation that is ruling over and from the city of Babylon when the book of Daniel opens.

But many others have ruled over Babylon during its long history.

- The Sumerians in 3200 BC.

- The Akkadians in 2300 BC.
- The Amorites in 1890 BC (The code of Hammurabi).
- The Assyrians in 900 BC (Isaiah; Nahum).
- The Chaldeans in 625 BC (Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Daniel; Habakkuk).
- Medo-Persia in 539 BC (Zechariah; Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther).
- The Greeks in 333 BC (Alexander the Great).
- The Parthians in 141 BC (Enemies of Rome).
- The Muslims in AD 650 (Iraq).

We will have much to say about the Medes and the Persians, but we should stress now that they were a combined nation at the time they defeated the Chaldeans. They had combined in 553 BC when Cyrus rebelled against his grandfather, the Mede king. But the Medes retained a prominent place in the combined empire.

We will also have much to say about the interaction of these kingdoms with the Jews. As we have already seen, the Chaldeans captured Jerusalem in 597 BC, and Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.

That was how Babylon began - how did Babylon end? Zosimus tells us that by AD 363 the city had become a wild animal park for the Persian king Shapur I. Who would have thought that when Babylon was at the height of its power? Jeremiah knew all about it 1000 years earlier.

Jeremiah 51:37 - And Babylon shall become heaps, A dwelling place for dragons, An astonishment, and an hissing, Without an inhabitant.

Now let's go back to verse 2.

The Babylonians had many different false gods (Marduk, Nebo, Ishtar). The singular word "god" in verse 2 likely refers to Marduk.

In this verse we meet a third king - the Lord in verse 2 is the true king! Nebuchadnezzar thought he was in charge, but God was in charge. God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take Judah captive, and when the time was right God removed Nebuchadnezzar from power.

Just about all that is left today of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar is a pile of bricks. When Nebuchadnezzar built the city, he had his name and picture imprinted on every brick that was used. One in the British museum shows the clear imprint of dog's foot over the name of the mighty king!

Nebuchadnezzar thought he was building an empire for himself, but he was really building a school for the Jews. God sent them there for a 70 year lesson they would never forget. When the 70 years were over, God removed the Chaldeans through Cyrus the Persian.

"And the Lord gave" in verse 2 is the first indication of a major theme of this book: the absolute sovereignty of God. God is in charge.

Babylon was victorious only because God allowed it to be. Later we will see the other side of the coin. Babylon will be defeated when it has finished serving God's purposes. Jeremiah 50-51 record the prophetic judgments against Babylon.

Was Jehoiakim (not Jehoiachin) taken back to Babylon? We can't tell just from verse 2. The phrase "which he carried" in verse 2 most likely just refers to the vessels from the temple, which we know went back to Babylon.

But what about 2 Chronicles 36:6-7?

Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the Lord to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.

Again, this verse does not actually say that Jehoiakim returned to Babylon, only that Nebuchadnezzar planned to take him there.

Why does it matter? It matters because Jeremiah seems to suggest that Jehoiakim would die in Judah.

Jeremiah 22:18-19 - Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament

for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! 19 He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Most likely Nebuchadnezzar planned to take Jehoiakim back, but after being captured after his rebellion, Jehoiakim died and his body was simply thrown down outside the city, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy. And again, his death happened about three years after the events in these opening verses.

Removing the vessels from the temple was a terrible insult to the Jews. They were taken back to Babylon and placed in the treasury of the Babylonian gods.

The mention of these vessels in verse 2 is an example of the unity of this book. They will play an important role later. In Chapter 5, Belshazzar is going to live just long enough to regret this theft!

There is a very interesting back story about the temple vessels. Hezekiah had displayed the temple articles one century earlier to Babylonian emissaries.

2 Kings 20:12-13 - At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13 And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

Before we read further, does this seem like a smart thing for Hezekiah to have done? No, and Isaiah is quick to tell him so.

2 Kings 20:14-19 - Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. 15 And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. 16 And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. 17 Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. 18 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. 19 Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?

That last verse is a classic! Who cares if I have brought calamity to the land if that calamity occurs long after I'm gone! Many things have changed in this world since the days of Hezekiah, but politicians are not one of them! Hezekiah should run for Congress!

Daniel 1:3-4

3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

The captives are called "children of Israel" here in verse 3, and later in verse 6 they are called "children of Judah." Why both phrases?

The northern kingdom (Israel) had been taken captive long ago by the Assyrians. These captives were from the southern kingdom (Judah). But, by this time, many from the northern kingdom had migrated south due to the Assyrian invasions, so Judah included people from both kingdoms.

But verse 3 tells us that the captives were of the king's seed, which would mean they were from the tribe of Judah. Most likely, the phrase "children of Israel" denotes their nationality (both the northern and southern tribes were Israelites in that sense), and the phrase "children of Judah" denotes their royal tribe, which of course was vital for the fulfillment of God's promise to King David in Psalm 89:36 that "his offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me."

The captives were of royal and noble birth. Why were they taken? Because their exile weakened the subjugated nation. Also, they served as hostages who would help keep the Jews in line while Nebuchadnezzar went back to assume the throne. We will learn in verse 6 that Daniel is one of these exiled children.

Daniel was taken early during Nebuchadnezzar's extended campaign against Jerusalem. Although that campaign eventually ended with the destruction of the city, that was not Nebuchadnezzar's original plan. Had the people heeded the message of Jeremiah, the city could have been spared. That it later had to be rebuilt was a result of both the original rebellion (that led to the exile in Babylon) and to the continued rebellion (that eventually led to the destruction of the city by Nebuchadnezzar).

Taking high born hostages strengthened the conquering nation. In fact, it was considered a good policy to raise up leaders from the conquered people. Alexander the Great did this, and Cyrus also did this (as we will see later in this book).

That desire explains why Babylonians wanted to assimilate Daniel and his friends. Nebuchadnezzar planned to train them so that they could later administer his rule among the Jews.

Daniel and his friends were almost certainly of noble birth, but were they of royal birth as well? We don't know for sure, but Josephus says that Daniel and his three friends were members of King Zedekiah's family.

How old were they? The Hebrew word for "youth" used here most probably places their ages between 14 and 17. Since we know that Daniel was still serving as a leader 70 years later, Daniel and his companions must have been very young when they were taken hostage and were almost certainly teenagers.

Plato tells us that the education of Persian boys began in their 14th year. The same may have been true of the Chaldeans.

These young men were without blemish. The ancients (much like many moderns) believed that one's outward appearance reflected an inner condition. We know that God did not allow men with certain physical deformities to be priests (Leviticus 21:17-21). The same Hebrew word translated "blemish" here is used in 2 Samuel 14:25 to describe David's son, Absalom.

That Daniel and the other exiled youth were placed in the charge of the master of the eunuchs has led some to conclude that Daniel and his three friends were made eunuchs by the Babylonians. Here is what Jerome said on that point:

From this passage the Hebrews think that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were eunuchs, thus fulfilling that prophecy which is spoken by the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah: "And they shall take of thy seed and make them eunuchs in the house of the king of Babylon" ... But perhaps the following words are opposed to this interpretation: "... lads, or youths, who were free from all blemish."

We looked at that prophecy by Isaiah to King Hezekiah earlier when we read 2 Kings 20:18, and we also find the same prophecy in Isaiah 39:7.

So we know from Isaiah that some of the royal children were made eunuchs by the Babylonians. Was Daniel among that group?

It is true that, unlike with Joseph, there is no mention of Daniel's wife or Daniel's children, but while their presence would be definitive evidence on this issue, their absence is not. And there is some extra-Biblical evidence to the contrary - Rabbinic tradition says that Daniel's three friends "married and begat sons and daughters."

We cannot know for certain, but I think that these four were most likely not eunuchs. Why?

First, the text seems to suggest they were taken in the earliest deportation, which would mean that Nebuchadnezzar still had hopes that he could set up a government there that would be loyal to him and be administered by those he had deported and trained.

Second, the king may have planned to use them as hostages, and their value as hostages would have been diminished had he made them eunuchs.

Third, had Isaiah's prophecy been fulfilled by Daniel and his friends, I think that fulfillment would likely have been mentioned.

Fourth, I agree with Jerome that the phrase "free from all blemish" suggests they were not eunuchs, although that phrase could have applied only when they were taken. But if the king purposely wanted boys without any physical defect, it seems odd that he would then mutilate them.

Fifth, the Hebrew word translated "eunuch" in verse 3 (saris) may not refer to a physical eunuch at all (although sometimes it does, as in Isaiah 39:7). The same word is used elsewhere to refer simply to a court official. For example, the same word is used to describe Potiphar in Genesis 37:36, and Potiphar was married.

We are told in verse 4 that they were taught "the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

The word "Chaldean" had two meanings - one broad and one narrow. The term "Chaldean" can be used broadly in an ethnic sense to describe anyone from the Chaldean tribe. The Chaldeans (led by Nabopolassar) overthrew the Assyrians and conquered the city of Babylon in 612.

But as with the word "Jew," the word "Chaldean" had both a nationalistic and a religious meaning. In

the latter narrower sense, the word "Chaldean" could refer just to a group of wise men that arose from within that larger tribe.

The use of the word here in verse 4 appears to have the broader ethnic meaning. These young captives were going to get a crash course in Chaldean culture!

What would they have learned?

Their study would likely have included a study of the old languages of Babylonia including two dialects of Sumerian.

Their study would also have included mathematics and science, areas in which Babylon was very advanced.

The Babylonians used a Base-60 number system, the remnants of which we can still see today - 60 minutes in an hour, 360 degrees in a circle. How did they arrive at such a base? Most numerical bases can be traced back to the human hand - our own Base-10 being the best example. But a single hand gives us Base-5, and the three joints on the four fingers of that hand give us Base-12. Most likely Base-60 came from an early merger of two groups of people - one that used Base-5 and one that used Base-12.

Their study would also have included Babylonian mythology, including Babylon's creation and flood legends.

Clay tablets at the British museum show the types of math problems and legends that they would have studied. Who knows? Maybe we have a copy of Daniel's homework!

The captives enrolled in the University of Babylon - and they were subjected to the same indoctrination and attempted brainwashing that some of our universities employ today. But, both then and now, attempted brainwashing has little effect on a discerning mind, as Babylon is about to discover.

It seems as if Daniel was able to take in the good part of his education while rejecting the rest, and if we are looking for good examples to follow from the life of Daniel, this should be the first one.

We don't fit the world's mold, and the world does not like that at all. The world is trying very hard to change us. We need to constantly fight against that, lest we ever become salt that has lost its savor.

Daniel 1:5

5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

The term for "the king's meat" used here is a technical Persian term that is used only twice in the Old Testament (both times in Daniel). It denotes gifts from the royal table.

The king's food was possibly intended simply to help reverse the effects of the siege and the deportation.

But there may have been a devious reason behind the king's generosity. Remember, the king's goal was to BRAINWASH these children. Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to forget their own land and culture and instead become Chaldeans. "How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris?"

Did it work? Out of all the captives, only four that we know of remained true to God. Only three were cast in that fiery furnace. (We will discuss later why Daniel was not among that group.)

Again, there is a lesson here for us. The devil constantly works to change our appetites. He wants us to crave the things of this world, and we need to resist the way that Daniel did.

Romans 12:2 - And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

1 John 2:15-16 - Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

2 Corinthians 6:17 - Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

Our greatest danger is that we will be absorbed by the world. That we will become an unrecognizable part of an alien, hostile, pagan culture. Nothing would please Satan more than that.

Typically these feasts would have begun with a sacrifice to the false Babylonian gods and would have consisted of many unclean foods. What that means is that Daniel and his friends had a dilemma. Would they compromise or would they not?

But shouldn't they have just eaten the rich food? After all, as verse 5 says, they were going to have "to stand before the king"! Wouldn't it be important for them to look their best in front of the king? And the phrase "stand before the king" included more than just standing, but also included royal service for the king. Shouldn't Daniel have eaten the food so he look his best for the king and be ready to serve the king?

No. Why not? Because Daniel answered to another king. There was another king that Daniel would stand before someday. In fact, I think we will see that Daniel is doing just that in the very last verse of this book. And the reason we see Daniel doing that in the final verse of the book is because Daniel was making the right decisions in the opening verses of the book.

Daniel 1:6-7

6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

At last we are introduced to the hero of these events, Daniel, and his three friends.

Their Hebrew names were all changed to Chaldean names so that they would forget their land and culture. At this time, your name was an integral part of your identity - much more so than today. Very often, and as we see here, someone's name contained the name of that person's (or rather the parents') god.

Here, Daniel (God is my judge) becomes Belteshazzar (Nebo protect my life or protect the king). The meaning of Daniel's name is hinted at in Daniel 4:8 when Nebuchadnezzar says that Daniel was named after his god, which was presumably Nebo. Another commentary said that Belteshazzar may refer to Belet, the wife of the false god Marduk.

There are several theories regarding the meanings of the other names. Here are the most popular.

- Hananiah (Yahweh has shown grace) became Shadrach (the command of Aku), which honors the Sumerian moon god, Aku.
- Mishaël (who is what God is?) became Meshach (who is what Aku is?)
- Azariah (Yahweh has helped) became Abednego (the servant of Nego, probably in reference to Nebo).

Now here is a good question - why do we remember Daniel by his *Hebrew* name and the others by their *Babylonian* names?

Most likely it is because Daniel wrote the book, and Daniel likely favored his original name. Also, Daniel is easier to pronounce than Belteshazzar. (I wonder if he had used his new name instead whether Belteshazzar would now be a popular name like Daniel is.)

Also, when the book was written during the Persian rule, the earlier king Belshazzar was a disgraced figure - which is very close to Daniel's new name, Belteshazzar. So perhaps Daniel changed his name back to Daniel at that time.

As for Daniel's three friends, he sometimes uses their old names, and he sometimes uses their new names. Their new names seem to have stuck, though, because those are the ones that are used during the fiery furnace account.

Note also that after the exile, some Jews still used Babylonian names. Zerubbabel means the seed of Babylon, and Shenazzar refers to a Babylonian moon-god. (We use days of the week today that refer to false gods.)

Whatever the reason, the Babylonians changed the name of the Jewish kings, and the Babylonians changed the names of Daniel's friends - but the Babylonians did not change Daniel's name! And they didn't change Daniel either.

Daniel 1:8

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

So far we have seen that Nebuchadnezzar's brainwashing plan for Daniel and his friends had three components: Teach them Chaldean culture and language, give them Chaldean names and feed them Chaldean food.

The first two items on that list did not require Daniel to compromise the word of God. Daniel could learn about the Babylonian culture and religion without having to adopt that culture or that religion. And the Babylonians could call him anything they wanted. Daniel knew his actual name, and in fact he apparently continued to use it.

But eating the Babylonian food was another matter. This is where our teenage hero and his friends had to draw the line. (And just think about that for a moment - these teenage boys drew the line at food!) Why did they have to draw that line?

Jewish food had to be prepared properly. Also, many animals were considered unclean and could not be eaten no matter how they were prepared. The Babylonians ate pork and horse, both of which violated the dietary laws in Leviticus 11, Leviticus 17, and Deuteronomy 14.

And another problem is that the Babylonian food would have been offered to pagan gods and would have been served at pagan feasts.

In his book *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, A. Leo Oppenheim tells us about the care and feeding of the gods of Babylon. Sumptuous food would have been offered to the gods, and whatever was left would have been brought to the king's table as the royal food.

To eat the food under those conditions would have made it appear that Daniel had wholeheartedly accepted the false Babylonian gods to whom that food had been offered.

We see a similar issue in First Corinthians. And we see it again in the last book of the Bible.

Revelation 2:14 - But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, **to eat things sacrificed unto idols**, and to commit fornication.

But what if they just ate the food and didn't believe in the false god? Would that have been all right? No, and it wouldn't be right 600 years later when the same problem rose in the Corinthian congregation. After first telling them to flee from idolatry, Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 10:20 - The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

God does not need secret agents. Remember Aesop's fable about the bat. The beasts and the birds had a war, and the bat joined both sides. With the birds he acted like a bird, and with the beasts he acted like a beast. When he was discovered he had to hide and only come out at night. I fear that some have become spiritual bats. Daniel was not.

Daniel made a resolution and he stuck to it. Was this difficult or easy?

Put yourself in Daniel's place. He had been dragged away from his home, and eventually his home had been destroyed. It seemed as if God had forsaken him. Daniel had been without much food for a long time during the siege. Maybe God wanted him to eat this food. Who would know, and what would it hurt?

The Babylonians were telling him to eat the food. Maybe even some of his friends were eating the food and urging him to do so as well.

Wouldn't this little quibble about food hurt his chances to get a good position in the government? Wouldn't it hurt his career? And on and on he could have gone with the rationalizations.

But Daniel knew what was right, and Daniel did what was right no matter what or who stood against him. In fact, verse 8 tells us that Daniel had purposed this in his heart. What that means is that Daniel had made the decision long before the food arrived!

We need more Daniels! These four teenage boys were not the first to be tempted with forbidden fruit, but unlike Adam and Eve, they passed the test!

Daniel and his friends did not get together to vote on what to do; they knew what to do. And there is a word for that - integrity! We don't see Daniel agonizing over what to do. There was no need to agonize over this decision - Daniel knew what he had to do - and he knew that before he was ever faced with the decision. If we like Daniel purpose in our heart to follow God's word, then we won't find ourselves with very many difficult decisions. Most of the decisions will have already been made!

#daniel