

119

MINISTRIES

“The following is a direct script of a teaching that is intended to be presented via video, incorporating relevant text, slides, media, and graphics to assist in illustration, thus facilitating the presentation of the material. In some places, this may cause the written material to not flow or sound rather awkward in some places. In addition, there may be grammatical errors that are often not acceptable in literary work. We encourage the viewing of the video teachings to complement the written teaching you see below.”

The Exiled Prophet, Part 2: Life in Babylon (Daniel 1)

Welcome back to our study on the book of Daniel. In our last teaching, we established that the book of Daniel was likely written in the sixth or fifth century B.C.E., and likely written by Daniel himself, or by a combination of Daniel and other Babylonian Jews. In this teaching we’re going to go through Daniel chapter 1. Let’s begin.

Daniel 1:1-7

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the LORD [YHWH] 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, 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 of the royal family and of the nobility, 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. 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 eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

So, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, attacked and conquered Jerusalem, raided the temple, and took young men, including Daniel, from the Judean aristocracy as captives to Babylon. For three years, these young men would be served the king’s food, and given an elite Babylonian education, in order to become advisors in the king’s court.

Before we read any further, we should address two important questions: first, how did the Jews end up being conquered and taken captive to Babylon? And second, why did God allow this to happen?

To answer the first question, we'll go back in history just a little bit. Around 930 B.C.E., Israel was split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12:16-20; J. Maxwell Miller & John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, Second Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 257). In 722 B.C.E., after conquering Babylon and most of the rest of the Near East, the nation of Assyria conquered Israel, and took most of the Israeli population into captivity (2 Kings 15:29; Robert Williams Rogers, *The History of Assyria* (Charles River Editors, 2018) pp. 102-106, 111-115). In 625 B.C.E., Nabopolassar, the king of the city of Babylon, made an alliance with the kingdom of the Medes (L.W. King, *A History of Babylon: From the Foundation of the Monarchy to the Persian Conquest*, (republished by Books On Demand, 2018) pp. 390-398).

Together, those kingdoms revolted against Assyria and gained their independence. They then proceeded to conquer most of the Near East themselves. In 608 B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar, who was the son of Nabopolassar, led the Babylonian army to Judah as we read in Daniel 1:1 (Noel, Ted, *A Primer on the Book of Daniel*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), p. 10).

So, that is how it came to be that many Jews, including Daniel, were captured by the Babylonians. But, why did God allow this to happen? Israel was God's chosen people, and the land of Canaan was their promised inheritance. Why were most of them taken away from their land by Assyria, and the rest of them taken away by Babylon? Why didn't God protect them, and keep them in the land that he had promised to them?

The prophets give us an answer. This exile and captivity of the Hebrew people was foretold by Isaiah. He says this:

Isaiah 39:5-7

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD [YHWH] of hosts: 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 [YHWH]. 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."

In fact, long before Isaiah's time, Moses prophesied the same thing:

Deuteronomy 28:36

The LORD [YHWH] will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known.

Moses also explained why this would happen:

Deuteronomy 28:45

All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD [YHWH] your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you.

So disobedience, sinning against YHWH, was the reason that Israel would be taken captive by a foreign nation. Other Scriptures tell us that the specific sin of *idolatry*, worshipping other gods, was one of the major things that would cause Israel to lose their promised land:

Deuteronomy 4:25-27

When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD [YHWH] your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD [YHWH] will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD [YHWH] will drive you.

Ezekiel 6:3-10

You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD [YHWH] ! Thus says the Lord GOD [YHWH] to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places. Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken, and I will cast down your slain before your idols. And I will lay the dead bodies of the people of Israel before their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. Wherever you dwell, the cities shall be waste and the high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed, your incense altars cut down, and your works wiped out. And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the LORD [YHWH].

“Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. And they shall know that I am the LORD [YHWH]. I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.”

So, YHWH warned well in advance that the people of Israel would be taken captive by a foreign nation, and that this would happen in large part because of Israel's idolatry. It turns out that Israel and Judah had been disobedient to YHWH's commandments in the years leading up to Daniel's captivity, and idolatry had been a major part of that disobedience.

Jeremiah 1:15-16

For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the LORD [YHWH], and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah. And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. **They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.**

Jeremiah 11:9-13

Again the LORD [YHWH] said to me, “A conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused

to hear my words. **They have gone after other gods to serve them.** The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. Therefore, thus says the LORD [YHWH], Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble. For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.

Jeremiah 5:19

And when your people say, ‘Why has the LORD [YHWH] our God done all these things to us?’ you shall say to them, ‘**As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.**’

Idolatry was not the only reason that Israel and Judah were cast out of the promised land; the prophets also mention sins like theft, fraud (Micah 1-2; Jeremiah 5:26-29; 22:13-17), slander (Jeremiah 9:1-9), mistreating the poor (Jeremiah 7:3-7), and basically every other kind of violation of God’s commandments (Ezekiel 22:6-16). However, it is clear that the worship of idols was one of the main sins that led to the Babylonian captivity.

So, returning to our story in Daniel chapter 1, because of the idolatry and other sins of the nation of Judah, Daniel and his friends have been taken captive into Babylon. Now, they are captives, strangers in a foreign land, and they are suffering because of the mistakes of their fathers. These young men were God-fearing people; they knew that this judgment had come upon their nation because of disobedience. Once they entered Babylon, their own obedience to God was immediately put to the test.

Daniel 1:8

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank.

Back in verse 5, it said that the king provided a portion of his food and wine for these Jewish captives to eat every day. However, we see here that Daniel refused to defile himself with the king’s food and wine, and later in verse 12 it says that he ate vegetables and drank water instead. This brings up an important question, and that is, what was wrong with eating the king’s food and drinking his wine? Why would that have defiled Daniel?

Numerous ideas have been proposed to explain why Daniel refused to eat the king’s food, but many of them fail to fully explain the situation. One idea is that Daniel was a vegetarian, so he wouldn’t have eaten any meat, and a teetotaler, so he wouldn’t have drunk any alcohol. However, the Torah does not prohibit eating meat or drinking wine; doing these things is not sinful or defiling, so that explanation makes little sense. Another idea is that the meat was from unclean animals, or that it contained blood—both things that the Torah does prohibit—but that doesn’t explain why the wine would have been a problem. Still another idea is that Daniel and his friends were demonstrating humility by not partaking in the expensive, upper-class foods that the king was providing. Instead, they chose to eat the inexpensive and ordinary meals that the commoners ate. However, again, the Torah does not prohibit eating expensive foods; eating such things would not be a matter of sin or defilement.

The best explanation for why Daniel would not eat the king's food is found in the history of Babylon itself. It turns out that the "king's food" was not just any food, but was food that was part of a ritual of worship directed at an idol. Here is how that ritual is described by Babylonian texts:

First, a table was brought in and placed before the image, then water for washing was offered in a bowl. A number of liquid and semiliquid dishes in appropriate serving vessels were placed on the table in a prescribed arrangement, and containers with beverages were likewise set out. Next, specific cuts of meat were served as a main dish. Finally, fruit was brought... Eventually, the table was cleared and removed and water in a bowl again offered to the image for the cleansing of the fingers. Having been presented to the image, the dishes from the god's meal were sent to the king for his consumption. Clearly, the food offered to the deity was considered blessed by contact with the divine and capable of transferring that blessing to the person who was to eat it. This person was always the king.

- A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Revised Edition completed by Erica Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 258

So, the "king's food" was food (and beverage) that was first offered to idols, and then sent to the king in order to impart a divine blessing upon him. The Babylonian kings sometimes shared these meals with people who they wished to honor (Oppenheim 258). This explains perfectly why Daniel would not eat the king's food; to eat it would be to participate in the final part of an idol-worshipping ceremony, and remember, the idolatry of the Jewish people was a big reason that Daniel was in captivity in the first place. Daniel knew that God found idolatry very offensive, so he didn't want to do anything associated with idol worship.

For more on the topic of eating things offered to idols, see our teaching, [Meat Sacrificed To Idols](#).

As a side note, it is interesting that the author of Daniel is not only familiar with this piece of Babylonian history, but he assumes that his readers are familiar with it also. There is no explanation given in this chapter for what the "king's food" actually is, so that would suggest that both the author and his original readers were familiar with sixth century Babylonian customs. In other words, since the author knew what the king's food was, it seems like the author lived in Babylon, and since the author assumes that his readers also knew what the king's food was, it seems like he was writing to other people who lived in Babylon too. This is another piece of evidence that suggests that the author of Daniel actually lived and wrote in sixth century Babylon, contrary to what some scholars would have us believe.

That aside, we can learn a lot from Daniel's actions here. Not only did he demonstrate strong faith and courage by his obedience to God, but the way he interacted with the Babylonians is also instructive. Let's take a look at how he expressed his convictions to his captors:

Daniel 1:8-10

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, 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 were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age?
So you would endanger my head with the king.”

So Daniel is up front and honest about his convictions, and requests that he be exempted from eating the king’s food. The chief of the eunuchs likes Daniel, and wants to accommodate him, but explains that he has a responsibility to keep Daniel in peak physical condition. Remember, the king’s food was thought to bestow a divine blessing on whoever ate it, so the chief eunuch was afraid that if Daniel did not eat this divinely blessed food, then Daniel’s health would suffer. The king was investing a lot into training Daniel to be a court advisor, so if Daniel wasn’t healthy, then the king would not be happy. What Daniel does next is very interesting. Rather than being defiant, and bluntly stating that he wouldn’t eat the food no matter what the king or anyone else thinks, Daniel proposes a solution that will allow Daniel to fulfill his duty to God, and the steward to fulfill his duty to the king:

Daniel 1:11-16

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 our 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 better in appearance and fatter 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.

So, rather than ignoring the concerns of the people he is negotiating with, Daniel respectfully addresses those concerns, and asks for a chance to prove that his religious practices won’t cause any harm. Daniel’s politeness wins the steward over, and he grants Daniel the opportunity to prove himself. In the end, this works out to everybody’s benefit. Scholar John Walvoord commends Daniel’s approach with these words:

Daniel’s approach also reflects his good judgment and common sense. Instead of inviting punishment by rebellion, he courteously requests of the chief prince of the eunuchs that he might be excused from eating food that would defile his conscience (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). He offered a creative compromise to achieve the goal of the king without violating his religious principles... Daniel did not object to the Babylonian names given to them nor to their education that involved the learning of the Chaldeans, including their religious views. These were not a direct conflict with the Jewish law. But here Daniel is exercising a proper conscience in matters that were of real importance.

- Walvoord, John F., *Daniel*, edited by Charles H. Dyer & Philip E. Rawley (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), p. 64

Another positive consequence of Daniel’s actions here is the fact that he and his friends ended up in even *better* health than the young men who ate the king’s food. This made their caretakers look even *better* in the eyes of the king, and at the same time, this was a demonstration that YHWH’s blessing was greater than any blessing provided by the Babylonian idols. By remaining faithful to YHWH, Daniel and his friends provided a great witness to the unbelievers around them.

Let’s read the last few verses in this chapter:

Daniel 1:17-21

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, 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 in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none 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.

In the Scriptures, many times, there will be a few verses at the beginning of a story that briefly summarize the entire story. Genesis 1:1 is a great example of this; it says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” which is a very brief summary of the story that comes next. The rest of Genesis chapter 1 describes the details of *how* God created the heavens and the earth. These last verses in Daniel chapter 1 are doing the same thing; they are providing a very brief summary of what is about to happen to Daniel and his friends over the course of the next sixty to seventy years. In the next few chapters of the book of Daniel, we will read the details of how the king found them to be “ten times better than all of the magicians and enchanters”.

What can we learn from this first chapter of the book of Daniel? Daniel gives us a great lesson in how to remain faithful to God without offending the unbelievers who might be inconvenienced by our convictions. When Daniel was faced with a situation that he could not compromise, he explained his position and politely requested that he be accommodated. When he was refused, he offered a reasonable solution that allowed Daniel to have a clear conscience, but also addressed the concerns and fears of the steward. God gave Daniel favor with the steward, and everything worked out great—probably even better than Daniel had imagined. We can use this same approach today.

For example, perhaps an unbelieving employer wants us to work on the sabbath. Obviously, we should obey God, rather than men, but we can take a cue from Daniel about how to potentially make this situation work. We can explain to our employer why we need that day off, and respectfully ask to be accommodated. If we are refused, then we can offer an alternative that sincerely addresses their concerns. So, if the employer is concerned that if we keep the sabbath, then not enough work will get done, then perhaps we could offer to work overtime on a different day of the week. We could ask them to “try it out” for a few weeks, and see if enough work is getting done to justify our day off. They just might be surprised at how well things turn out for them. Daniel gives us a great example of how to maintain our faith in a hostile world, by negotiating with and ultimately blessing the unbelievers around us.

In the next teaching in this series, we will examine chapter 2 of the book of Daniel. We hope to see you there.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

EMAIL: Info@119ministries.com

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/119Ministries

WEBSITE: www.TestEverything.net & www.ExaminaloTodo.net

TWITTER: www.twitter.com/119Ministries#