

Daniel Chapter 1:1-7

Last week we had an introduction to the book of Daniel and this week we will start with Dan 1. The chapter can be called “Daniels training in Babylon” and can be divided into the following sections:

- a. The Deportation, vs 1-2.
- b. Daniels Selection and Education, vs 3-7.
- c. Daniel and his Friend’s Testing, vs 8-16.
- d. Daniels Blessing, vs 17-21.

The Deportation

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 delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia^[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.

Vs 1: In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Jer 25:1 notes Neb came in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, yet we have Daniel stating it was in the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by noting the difference as to how time was reckoned in the two passages. Jeremiah lived in Judah and therefore used the Jewish way of noting time whereas Daniel lived in Babylon and therefore uses the Babylonian method of dating. Jewish reckoning credits any portion of a year as a full year. So, for example if I were a King and ascended to the throne in December I would have ruled for only one month, but Jewish time keeping would credit that month as a full year. In Babylonian time keeping the duration of a king’s rule was measured from his first full year in power. So, in our example if I started my reign in December, and carried over my reign into the next year, my reign would be counted as starting the Jan following the first year of my ascension. In Jewish time I would have ruled for two years (even though it was only 13 months). In Babylonian time, I would have ruled for 1 year (even though it was 13 months).

We discussed Jehoiakim briefly last week. In summary he was a son of Josiah and an evil king. Remember Josiah had attempted to prevent Pharaoh Neco of Egypt from traversing Judah to help the Assyrians fend off the Babylonians. Josiah was killed by Neco’s troops at the battle of Megiddo in 609 BC (2 K 23:29-30). Following Josiah’s death, Josiah’s son Jehoahaz became king but lasted only three months. 2 K 23:32-33 states Neco imprisoned him and took him to Egypt where he died under Neco’s charge (2 K 23:34, 2 Chron 36:1-4). Neco then appointed Jehoiakim as a vassal and imposed tribute on Judah (2 K 23:36).

After the defeat of the Assyrians and Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, Neb came south and laid siege to Jerusalem and conquered it.

Vs 2: And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia^[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.

The word “Lord” here is Adonai, which is the primary word used for God in the book. The word YHWH appears in chapter 9.

Note it is God who delivers Jehoiakim. This was all a part of God’s sovereign will and a fulfillment of Is 39:1-8 as well as Jer 25:1-11. Note God allowed the invasion and destruction of Judah for two primary reasons. The first is noted in 2 Chron 36:21, *The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah.* Fructenbaum claims that although the dating is obscure the Israelites had failed to keep the Sabbatical years proscribed by the law (Lev 25). There should have been 70 Sabbatical rest years, but they missed them. God decided to allow them to serve a year in captivity for each sabbath rest year they missed. Jeremiah had twice predicted the nation would be in captivity for 70 years (Jer 25:10-11 and 29:10-14). This date of the first deportation marks the beginning of that 70-year period. The second reason Judah was invaded and deported was due to idolatry. Jeremiah succinctly addressed this issue in Jer 25:1-11. Jehoiakim was initially carried off to Babylon in this first deportation as noted in 2 Chron 36:5-6. Neb returned him to Judah where he rebelled necessitating Neb to return in 597. Jehoiakim died before Neb arrived and his son Jehoiachin ascended to the throne. Neb took Jerusalem a second time and then deported several skilled artisans and officials (2 K 24:15-17).

In this first deportation, we note Neb carries off some articles from the temple and puts them in his own. This was a customary practice in ancient times for it showed the conquering King’s gods were stronger than the conquered people’s gods. It is interesting to note two things here: One is that the Babylonians found no images of the God of Israel. Because God had forbidden any image of himself as there is nothing physical that can represent him. All the Babylonians could do was to remove cups, bowls, and service items. Second, this act sowed the seeds for Babylon’s destruction as these very articles were the ones used by Belshazzar at his idolatrous feast just prior to the Mede-Persian invasion (Dan 5:3).

In Gen 11:1-9 we have the story of the tower of Babel. Note the tower was built on the plain of Shinar. It was a center of idolatry. In the KJV Babylon is translated as Shinar. The Nation of

Judah was being deported to the world capital of idolatry. It was if God had said to the Israelites, “you like idolatry? I am going to place you in the center of it!”

Daniel’s Selection and Education, vs 3-7.

Once the captives reached Babylon they were sorted and some selected for service to the King. In these verses we learn of that process.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.^[b] ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service. ⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

Vs 3, Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—

The duty of sorting and selecting those of the Jewish deportation fell to *Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials*. The KJV translates this phrase as the *master of his eunuchs*. The Hebrew word here is translated as *eunuch* or one who has been castrated. In ancient cultures it was common to have eunuchs serve the king. This was to ensure they would not be distracted in their service by marriage, and would not be swayed, enticed, or entangled with any female who was connected to the king whether by marriage or one his concubines. Anyone whom Ashpenaz chose would also certainly be castrated so they would be singularly devoted to the King.

Dan 1:3 thus fulfills what Isaiah said to Hezekiah in Is 39:7, *And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.* (this verse is repeated in 2 K 20:18).

Note whom Ashpenaz chose to sort. It was those of the royal family and the nobility. The idea was simple: if Babylon could change the leaders of Judah into Babylonians, then the rest of the people would follow. This distinction between the royal family and nobility also explains why Daniel was distinguished from his three companions. We have no record of Daniel’s or his companion’s genealogy, but most likely Daniel was of royal blood while his three companions were nobility.

Vs 4a: young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace.

Here we see what Babylon valued, and it is as true for the world today as it was then. Note the attributes Ashpenaz was seeking:

- a. *Young men*, the Hebrew word for *young men* refers to someone between 15 and 20 years old.
- b. *Without physical defect, handsome men*. The phrase without defect refers to any deformity that may afflict someone (i.e. no 6 fingered servants). Handsome needs no explanation. Ashpenaz was after men who were good looking, attractive, and pleasing in appearance.
- c. Smart men: note there are three attributes listed. The first is someone *showing aptitude for every kind of learning*. Some translations have *"gifted in wisdom."* In other words, they were intelligent. They had the capacity to grasp a wide range of concepts and subjects. Second, they were *"well informed"* which means they were already knowledgeable. Ashpenaz was looking for men who had a good base of understanding. Lastly, they were *quick to learn*. In other words, they had intellectual ability but also the ability to gain new knowledge quickly. The KJV translates *quick to learn* as *"understanding science,"* whereas the NASB translates this as *endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge*. Ashpenaz was looking for men who were intelligent, knowledgeable, and quick to learn. And so, it is today. Our world values youth. It values beauty. It values smarts. These are the qualities that get people ahead.

Note this selection process was to choose men who would be qualified *to serve in the King's service*. The KJV says *"to stand in the King's palace."* The idea was to select men who could function in government and more specifically as ones who would manage the rest of the Jewish people. Babylon had lots of captive peoples and needed intermediaries trained in both the captive and captor cultures to ensure smooth administration of domestic affairs.

The process of cultural indoctrination and training these men involved four things:

- a. Teaching them the language and literature of the Babylonians.
- b. Feeding them Babylonian food.
- c. Educating them for three years.
- d. Renaming them with Babylonian names.

Vs 4b: *He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.*

Daniel and his friends were to learn Aramaic and the literature of the Babylonians. Daniel mastered Aramaic so well he wrote half the book in it. The word *literature* means writings, or book and implies learning both science and the occult. Hence the trainees were to be steeped in Babylonian theology and cosmology.

Vs 5a, *the king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table.*

The second way in which these trainees were to be enculturated was to feed them Babylonian food. The KJV states they were given a daily provision of the King's meat and wine. No doubt these dietary items violated the Mosaic law, hence Daniel's objection in verse 8.

Vs 5b, they were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

Note, the trainees were given a three-year immersive educational experience. The idea was to have them lose any former cultural way of life and be fully transformed into a new cultural existence.

Vs 6-7, Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

The last piece of the enculturation process was to rename them. The idea was to wipe out their old identity and give them a new one rooted in their new culture. In Hebrew, Daniel means either God is Judge or God is my Judge. Hananiah means YHWH is or has been gracious. Mishael is the question, "who is what God is?" Azariah means YHWH has helped. Daniel and Mishael both carry the suffix "el" referring to Elohim, the general word for God. Hananiah and Azariah both carry the suffix "yah" which is a shortened form YHWH, God's covenant name. Hence all four names have reference to the God of Israel and are connected to who the Jewish people were, God's chosen people. Ashpenaz gave them new names to reflect their new culture and identity. Each new name was associated with a Babylonian deity. Daniel became Belteshazzar, which means "may Bel protect his life" (Bel was the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon). Hananiah was named Shadrach, which means the command of Aku (the moon God of Babylon). Mishael was named Meshach, which means who is what Aku is (Aku the moon god). Azariah was named Abed-Nego, which means the servant of Nebo (Nebo was the Babylonian god of wisdom).

Note the intention: these trainees were to learn the language and wisdom of their masters. They were to eat its food and be immersed in its culture for three years. They were renamed, all to wipe out their old cultural identification and create a new identity for them.

As people of faith, we have been given a new identity in Christ, yet we still live in the world. There is a tension there as the values, culture, affections, and what we mentally and spiritually feed upon are vastly different between the two worlds. Here is the question for us, in which world is our identity? Whose food are we eating? Where are we immersed? What is your name connected to? (i.e., what things do people associate with your name?).