

A WALK THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT
TIME FRAME #7– THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY
READING NOTES
586 BC TO 538 BC
SELECTED CHAPTERS IN DANIEL

SUMMARY

Most of what we know about the Captivity of the Jews in Babylon is found in the book of Daniel. This man of God lived for over 70 years in Babylon. His testimony of how to live in the world but be of the world is unparalleled in Scripture. His life continues to be an example for us to follow today.

Unlike the captivity of their ancestors in Egypt, these Jews were not slaves but members of the general population. They built houses, held jobs and were free to practice their faith. Since the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, they developed the Synagogue, where they met for prayer and instruction in the Bible. By the end of their 70 years in captivity, the Jews were cured of their tendency to drift into idolatry. Never again would they worship other gods.

The book of Esther takes place after the Captivity and therefore these notes do not include it. However, the book is valuable in understanding the experience of the Jews in the Babylonian and Persian Empires. You are encouraged to take the time to read it.

MAJOR EVENTS

EVENT # 62	SCRIPTURE
THE JEWS UNDER BABYLON	DANIEL 1-5
NOTES	
<p>1. Daniel and his friends were taken from Jerusalem at the first siege of Nebuchadnezzar is 605 BC. This was when the articles were taken from the Temple and the brightest of the Jewish youth were taken to Babylon. The Babylonians return in 586 BC and destroy the city. Daniel 1:1-7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord uses the Babylonians to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah to Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20. Hezekiah had shown some Babylonian officials the treasures and military strength of Judah, in part hoping to gain their favor as allies against Assyria. This showed a lack of trust in God. As a result, God told of this very event in Daniel 1. • One purpose the Babylonians had in deporting this group of leaders and promising youth was to weaken Judah, and reduce the chances of a rebellion. Another reason is to train them to be government officials of the growing Babylonian Empire. • These young men were to be educated and trained for three years. The Babylonians tried to assimilate them into their culture by destroying their Jewish identity. This included giving them Babylonian names, feeding them Babylonian food and educating them in Babylonian literature. <p>NOTE: <i>This gives us a picture of how conquering empires tried to remove distinctive national identities in order to assimilate various cultures and nationalities into one empire. It took a determined effort to keep ones identity while also surviving in this new environment. The Jews did this more effectively than any other nation in the ancient world.</i></p> <p>2. Daniel and his three friends determine to not disobey the Law in their new environment. As they do so they give us a great example of how to be in the world but not of the world. Daniel 1:8-21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice that Daniel chooses to take a stand only when he is being told to disobey God regarding the diet. He does not take a stand against the name change or the education. (vs.8) 	

- As Daniel takes the step of talking to the official in charge of them, God steps in and gives him favor with that official. Daniel does not make this a demand or communicate he is taking a stand. He shows he understands the official has a responsibility to the king and offers an alternative that will allow him to not defile himself and still accomplish what the official needs to satisfy the king. This includes a time table to evaluate. At the end of that trial, the diet Daniel suggests is working so the official makes it permanent. **(vs.9-16)**
 - When the three years were up, Nebuchadnezzar personally tested them. God had given the youths grace to learn well, and they were found to excel beyond anyone else. In addition, God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams – a skill that would lift him above all other advisors.
 - Daniel will remain in the court for all 70 years of the Babylonian Captivity. He will serve under three different Babylonian kings. He will survive the transition when Babylon is defeated by the Persians. He will then serve under Cyrus and Darius, the Persian Kings. God will sustain and protect him as Daniel faithfully lives for God and faithfully serves these powerful men.
3. In the early months of their governmental career Daniel and his friends are faced with a life or death situation. Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that troubles him, and demands that his interpreters not only interpret the dream, but discern the dream without the king telling it to them. God uses this situation to give Daniel the top position in the government: overseer of all the wise men and special advisor to the king in the court itself. **Daniel 2**
- The king called in the men who specialized in interpreting dreams and inquiring of the gods. Daniel and his friends are not in this group, so are not at this meeting with the king. Note that these men know they cannot tell the king his dream, for only the gods could do that. **(vs.1-11)**
 - As Daniel faces the swords of the Palace Guard, his calm response gains him time **(vs.14-15)**. He shows his faith in God by asking that an appointment be made with the king before God revealed the dream to him **(vs.16)**.
 - Daniel goes to his friends with the situation and together they go to prayer. They appeal to God's mercy/compassion. Note the absence of fear! When God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel he responds with thanksgiving and worship. **(vs.17-23)**
 - As Daniel addresses the king, he makes sure he knows it is God, not he, Daniel, Who will reveal the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. It is interesting that Daniel does not say God revealed the dream to himself. Daniel is humble enough to be used as an instrument of God, but in a way that he does not draw attention to himself. **(vs.24-30)**
 - God gives Nebuchadnezzar a vision of world history, and the four empires that ruled over the ancient world. The final empire he sees is the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. **(vs.31-45)**
 - Head of Gold – Babylonian Empire
 - Chests and arms of silver – Medo-Persian Empire
 - Middle and thighs of bronze – Greek Empire
 - Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay – Roman Empire. (Some Bible scholars see the mixed feet as Europe. In this way the Roman Empire continues to have an influence on world history.)
 - The stone – The Kingdom of Christ
 - As a result of this, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes God as Lord and promotes Daniel to the highest position in his court. **(vs.46-49)**
4. **Daniel 3** contains one of the best known stories in the Bible – Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the Fiery Furnace. In this story we see the continuing determination they have to not disobey the Law of God; their continuing trust in God; God's grace and protection given; Nebuchadnezzar's deepening acknowledgement and worship of The Most High God.
- The statue Nebuchadnezzar builds of himself is 90 feet high. It resembles the statue in his dream, except it is entirely made of gold. Perhaps this is to assert his kingdom will not be superseded by any other. It is in the plain of Dura, which may have been where the Tower of

Babel was built in **Genesis 11**. In addition to being built out of his pride and desire to be worshipped as a god, the statue also would serve as a way to unify his diverse Empire. **(vs.1)**

- Nebuchadnezzar calls representatives of all of the conquered people in his empire to come to the dedication ceremony. He declares that anyone who refuses to bow down to the statue will be put to death by burning. **(vs.2-7)**
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to participate. It is possible they do not even attend the ceremony, for their refusal to bow is brought to the attention of the king by other jealous officials. They are brought to the king and ordered to bow to it. Nebuchadnezzar's desire seems to be for them to comply so they can be spared. The special position they hold is seen in the fact they are not put to death immediately, but are given this opportunity. **(vs.8-15)**
- The three men refuse, placing their faith in God to save them. However, even if God determines to allow them to die. They will not sin by worshipping either Nebuchadnezzar's gods or his statue. **(vs.16-18)**
- Furious, the king orders the fire to be so hot the soldiers who bind and cast them into the furnace are killed by the heat. Immediately Nebuchadnezzar sees that not only are the three Jews not killed, but have been joined by a fourth being. This is either a 'Christophany' (an Old Testament appearance of Christ) or an angel. Either way, God is with them. They are walking around the furnace, unharmed by the flames. The king tells them to come out. **(vs.26-27)**
 - Nebuchadnezzar uses the name 'Most High God' for the Lord. This name refers to God being Lord over all of heaven and over every nation on the earth.
 - There is no evidence the men were even in the furnace.
- Nebuchadnezzar worships God; declares no one is to ever speak anything against God again; and promotes the three men to even higher positions. **(vs.28-30)**

5. **Daniel 4** reveals the impact Daniel and God had on Nebuchadnezzar's life. The Lord determined to discipline Nebuchadnezzar for his pride. It is important to note that rather than judge him like most Gentile rulers, God disciplines Nebuchadnezzar like He would one of His people. In the end, the king is drawn into an even deeper relationship with God, evident by his words of worship. There are some Bible scholars who believe Nebuchadnezzar may have become a follower of God.

- **Chapter 4:1-3** reflect Nebuchadnezzar's heart after the events of the rest of the chapter have taken place. "Most High God" – as stated earlier, this name reflects God's Lordship over heaven and the nations of the earth. There is evidence that he has placed himself fully under this God of the Jews.
- After yet another dream, Nebuchadnezzar asks his wise men to interpret it for him. When they are unable to, Daniel once again is called in. Unlike chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar tells them the dream. **(vs.4-18)**
- Daniel shows both tact and compassion as he tells Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the dream. **(vs.19-27)**
 - The dream starts by showing the great power of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. His power reaches to the edges of the known world.
 - However, Nebuchadnezzar is about to be disciplined for his pride. He will lose his senses and live like an animal, separated from people, for a period of seven years. God wants Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge that God is the One who has given him this great empire.
 - Daniel beseeches the king to humble himself, practice personal holiness and compassion for people.
- Nebuchadnezzar ignores Daniel's advice. He has a moment of pride, taking the credit for his empire. Immediately, a voice from heaven announces that the fulfillment of his dream was starting at that moment. This discipline will last until he repents. Nebuchadnezzar immediately begins to act as had been predicted. **(vs.28-33)**
- After the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses. He acknowledges that it is God Who governs over the affairs of people. At that moment Nebuchadnezzar is restored personally as well as his position as king. His response is to worship God. **(vs.34-37)**

6. **Daniel 5** takes us ahead a number of years, to the reign of Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. The word ‘father’ in verses 2, 11, 13 and 18 can be translated ‘ancestor’ or ‘predecessor’. In his prideful arrogance, he has the Temple vessels brought in to a party and desecrates them by drinking wine and praising the many gods of Babylon. God announces that his life and the kingdom of Babylon would both end that night.

- We are not told why Belshazzar chose the God of the Jews to mock, but he desecrates the vessels of God and mocks Him. **(vs.1-4)**
- As the hand of God appears and writes the words on the wall, the king fearfully calls his wise men to interpret them to him. Like before, they are unable to interpret what has come from the One True God. Desperate, Belshazzar promises wealth and position to the one who can.
- The queen in **verse 10** is actually the Queen Mother, daughter to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar’s mother. She remembers Daniel, and brings him to the king’s attention. It is clear the Daniel no longer has a significant position in the Babylonian government under Belshazzar. **(vs.10-12)**
- Daniel is brought to the king and offered the wealth and position. Daniel is not impressed, and tells the king to give them to someone else. He is willing to tell the king the interpretation for free. Daniel, as always, is humble and uninterested in self-promotion. **(vs.13-17)**
- Daniel then proceeds to give the interpretation of the words. He goes back to the experience of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4. The point is clear. Belshazzar’s prideful arrogance exceeds that of his grandfather. He has mocked God and desecrated the holy vessels from the Temple. In response, God has chosen that very night to bring his judgement. Note that unlike His dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, there is no opportunity for repentance for Belshazzar. **(vs.18-29)**
- While Belshazzar was having his feast, the Persian army had managed to encircle the capital. That night they attacked and entered the city swiftly, killing Belshazzar and defeating the Babylonians. **(vs.30)**

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS:

EVENT # 63	SCRIPTURE
THE JEWS UNDER THE PERSIANS	DANIEL 6, 9:1-19
<p>NOTES</p> <p>1. Daniel serves in the Persian government and quickly distinguishes himself to the point Darius plans to promote him over all of the kingdom. As we come to chapter 6, Daniel has faithfully served in these pagan governments for 70 years while not only staying faithful to God, but having a tremendous influence that led to Nebuchadnezzar and Darius coming to respect and worship God. The jealousy of the other governors (satraps) lead to a plot to rid themselves of Daniel. This leads to the well-known story of Daniel and the lion’s den. Daniel 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Satraps were provincial governors whose primary responsibilities were keeping the peace and collecting tribute/taxes for the Persian Empire. Three men called Presidents were placed 	

over the 120. Daniel is one of these three, perhaps as a result of Belshazzar's promotion. Distinguishing himself even among the three, Darius plans to put Daniel over the whole Empire. **Vs.1-3)**

- The other two presidents and at least some of the Satraps come up with a plan to use Daniel's relationship with God as a trap. Appealing to his pride, they convince Darius to set a law that no one can pray to their god for 30 days, but can pray to him only. Once this decree/law is declared and signed, no one, not even Darius himself can nullify it. **(vs.4-9)**
- Despite the decree, Daniel prays as usual, which is exactly what the men anticipated. Spying on him, they then take word to Darius that Daniel has broken the law. Realizing what they have done, Darius tries all day to discover a way to save Daniel, but in the end, has no choice but to follow through with the punishment. **(vs.10-15)**
- Darius appeals to Daniel's God to save him, and driven by grief, fasts that night, alone in his chambers. The next morning Darius anxiously goes to the lion's den to see what Daniel's fate had been. God preserved Daniel's life through an angel because Daniel was innocent before God. Bringing Daniel out, Darius then casts his accusers in. This was in keeping with ancient law that stated if one falsely accused another, they were to suffer the same fate they had sought for their victim.
- Darius then wrote another decree, praising God. This decree was then sent throughout the empire. As he had under the Babylonians, Daniel prospered under the Persian kings. **(vs.25-28)**

2. As Daniel reads the words of Jeremiah the prophet, he comes to realize that the 70 years predicted for the captivity of the Jews was almost over. In addition, the prophet had said the Babylonians would be punished for attacking God's people, and that too had taken place, as the Persians defeated them. Daniel then turns to God in prayer, asking that the Jews be spiritually ready for their imminent return to the Land. **Daniel 9:1-19**

- Daniel is reading **Jeremiah 25:1-14**, which states that the Jews will be held in captivity for 70 years, after which the Babylonians will be punished. **(vs.1-2)**
- Daniel goes before God with a spirit of humility, seen in his fasting and dress. Even as he begins with confession, Daniel takes a moment to worship and appeal to God's steadfast love for His people and His character, which keeps His Word to bless His people when they are walking in obedience to Him. **(vs.3-4)**
- Daniel's confession acknowledges the justice of God's discipline in removing them from the Land. God had warned them in **Deuteronomy 28** that He would bless them in the Land if they were faithful in following Him. However, if they were not faithful, and especially if they worshipped other gods, He would judge them and disperse them out of the Land. Despite this warning, and despite the warnings of the prophets throughout their history, the Jews had rebelled against God and had worshipped other gods. Therefore God was justified in punishing them. **(vs.5-15)**
- Daniel then appeals to God's mercy and asks that the Jews be allowed back into the Land and that Jerusalem be rebuilt. **(vs.16-19)**
 - The appeal is to God's name and honor. The Jews are associated with God, and their removal from the land, while just, had caused the other nations to question the Lord. **(vs.16)**
 - Daniel focuses his prayer on the rebuilding of the Temple and renewed worship of God. **(vs.17)**
 - Daniel is quick to note they do not deserve to be allowed back into the Land, so he appeals to God's mercy. **(vs.18)**
 - Daniel closes his prayer by asking God to act quickly. **(vs.19)** God indeed will act quickly, for the Captivity is almost over. Within the year, King Cyrus will issue a proclamation allowing the Jews to return to the Land.

3. Final Notes:

- For further insight into the experience of the Jews during the Captivity, read the book of **Esther**. While the events recorded there occur after the Jews return to the Land, the experience of the Jews would have been similar during the Captivity.
- Daniel's writings undoubtedly found their way into the wisdom literature of the Persians. Many Bible scholars believe that these are the writings that lead the Magi to go see the Christ child some 500 years later.
- Deprived of their Temple, the Jews are determined to keep their religion active. The result is the development of the Synagogue, where they meet each Sabbath for Bible reading and prayer. The Synagogue was also where their children were taught the Bible. They will bring the Synagogue with them back to the Land, where every village with at least 10 adult men will have one. They will play a big part in the life and ministry of Jesus.
- The Captivity is effective in the lives of the Jews. Never again will they give in to Idolatry. In fact, it is their fierce defense of their religion and determination to keep their Law that will be their identifying mark throughout their history.

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS: