

BABYLONIAN EXILE

2 Kings 24:8-14; 25:18-21; Daniel 1 - 6; Jeremiah 29:1-23

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, King Darius

Key-location: Babylon

Key-repetitions:

- Conspiracy/hostility against the Jews (Dan 3:8-12; 6:3-16).
- Temptation resisted: to be defiled with the king's food (Dan 1:8-16); to worship the gold statue (3:1-18); to pray to the king (6:1-10).
- God rescued his servants: from impure food (Dan 1:8-16); from the furnace (3:21-27); from the lions' den (6:16-23).
- Daniel and his friends faced dangers: to be impure (Dan 1:8); to be killed (Dan 2:12); the furnace (Dan 3:19-30); the lions' den (Dan 6:1-22).
- Daniel's successes (Dan 1:9, 20; 2:48-49; 6:2-3).
- Daniel was loved by God (Dan 9:23; 10:11, 19).
- Daniel prayed (Dan 2:17-8; 6:10; 9:4, 20-23).
- The destiny of people/nations is determined by God (Dan 2:20-21, 41; 4:17, 25, 30-37; 7:25-27; 9:20-27).

Key-attitudes:

- The arrogant pride of Nebuchadnezzar.
- The commitment of Daniel and his Jewish friends to be loyal to the Lord.
- Conflict and hostility.
- The courage of Daniel and his Jewish friends.
- The antagonism of the wicked against those who served the Lord.

Initial-situation:

Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had 19 kings during its 209 years of existence. Assyria conquered Israel and relocated Israel's citizens into different countries that it had conquered. Judah, the Southern Kingdom continued for another 136 years. Judah had twenty kings during 345 years. After Israel was defeated, Judah experienced a spiritual decay that was interrupted by the reforms of Kings Hezekiah, Uzziah, Jothan, Hezekiah and Josiah. Finally, God became so angry with Judah that he made Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquer and destroy Judah.

Babylon's first invasion into Judah took place during the first year Nebuchadnezzar was king in 605 B.C. Daniel and his friends were taken captive at this time. Babylon's second invasion into Judah took place during the eighth year that Nebuchadnezzar was king in 597 B.C. The Babylonians emptied the treasures of both the Temple and the palace, and carried the capable people of Jerusalem into exile. Babylon's third invasion into Judah took place during the eighteenth year that Nebuchadnezzar was king, in 587 B.C. The Babylonians set fire to Jerusalem, broke down the city walls and carried into exile most of the people.

Initial-problem:

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah and took some Jews into exile. Among the exiles were four Jewish youth: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Final-situation:

The Lord rescued Daniel from the lions' den and made him prosper. Daniel was greatly loved by God.

BIBLE STORY

Young Israelites' Training in Babylon

During the first year that Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, he invaded Judah and took some intelligent Jewish youth into exile in Babylon (Dan 1:1-2; 2 Kin 24:1).

King Nebuchadnezzar told the chief official of his palace to choose from the royal family some healthy, handsome, Israelite youth, who had potential for leadership. The official was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. They were to eat from the same menu served at the king's table: the best food, the finest wine. After three years' training, they were to enter the king's service. Four youth from Judah were selected: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 1:3-7).

Daniel determined not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. He asked the guard responsible for them, "Please test your servants for ten days on a simple diet of nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare us with the young men who eat the royal food. Decide on our diet on the basis of what you see."

The guard tested them with vegetables and water for ten days. The Jewish youth looked healthier than the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard exempted the Jewish youth from the royal menu of food and wine and gave them vegetables instead (Dan 1:8-16).

God gave these four young men wisdom and the ability to learn. Daniel could also understand all kinds of visions and dreams. At the end of the three years of training, King Nebuchadnezzar found Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego superior to all the other young men; so they entered the king's service (Dan 1:17-21).

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him. He summoned the Babylonian wise men and told them, "I had a dream that disturbs me and I want to know what it means."

The wise men answered, "O king, live forever! Tell us your dream, and we will interpret it."

The king told the wise men, "You must tell me the dream; then you must interpret it. If you do not tell me the dream and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces. If you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive gifts and honor. Now, tell me the dream and interpret it."

The wise men answered the king, "Nobody anywhere can do what the king asks! It is impossible. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods."

The king became so angry that he ordered the execution of all the Babylonian wise men. Daniel and his companions were included in this death warrant (Dan 2:1-13).

Daniel urged his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to pray for mercy from the God of heaven, so that the four of them might not be executed. That night the secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Daniel praised the God of heaven. Daniel told the man in charge of the execution, "Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream" (Dan 2:14-24).

The commander took Daniel to the king. The king asked Daniel, "Are you able to tell me my dream and interpret it?"

Daniel replied, "No wise man can explain the king's secret. The Lord God revealed the secret to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other men, but so that you, O king, will understand what you dreamed."

Daniel described the king's dream and then gave its interpretation (Dan 2:25-45).

King Nebuchadnezzar fell facedown to the ground and told Daniel, "Your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets. I know because you were able to reveal this secret."

Then the king showered Daniel with gifts and made him ruler over the province of Babylon and in charge of all its wise men. At Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to administrative posts (Dan 2:46-49).

The Gold Statue and the Furnace

King Nebuchadnezzar had a gold statue made that was 90 feet high and nine feet thick. He summoned the leaders in the province to come to Babylon for the dedication of the statue. The master of ceremonies proclaimed, "Attention everyone! When you hear the musical instruments,

fall to your knees and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall to his knees and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

When they heard the musical instruments, all the people groups of every language fell to their knees and worshiped the gold statue (Dan 3:1-7).

Some astrologers told King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who ignore you. They neither serve your gods nor worship the gold statue you set up."

Enraged, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. He commanded soldiers to tie them up and throw them into the blazing furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were fully dressed when they were tied up and thrown into the blazing furnace. The fire was so hot that the flames killed the soldiers who threw them into the blazing furnace (Dan 3:8-23).

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in surprise and shouted, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? Look! I see four men walking around in the fire. They are not tied up. They are unharmed. The fourth man looks like a son of the gods."

Nebuchadnezzar approached the door of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego walked out of the fire. The government leaders crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed the three men; not a hair singed, not a scorch mark on their clothes, and there was no smell of smoke on them (Dan 3:24-30).

Nebuchadnezzar died and his son Belshazzar became king. Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom (Dan 5:29-31).

Daniel During King Darius' Reign

Darius appointed 120 governors to administer all parts of the kingdom, one of whom was Daniel. Daniel did so much better than the other supervisors and governors, that the king planned to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. The supervisors and governors tried to find some scandal that they could use against Daniel. But Daniel was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any evidence of negligence or misconduct against Daniel; unless, it has something to do with the religion of his God" (Dan 6:1-5).

So the supervisors and governors conspired together and went as a group to the king. They said, "King Darius, live forever! We all agreed that the king should issue the following decree, 'Anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.' Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered, in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians." King Darius put the decree in writing (Dan 6:6-9).

After the decree was published, Daniel went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Daniel got down on his knees and prayed. The conspirators found Daniel praying. They went to the king and reminded him about his royal decree.

They told the king, "Daniel, one of the Jewish exiles, ignores you and defies your degree. He still prays three times a day." The king heard this and was greatly distressed.

They reminded the king, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians the king's decree can never be canceled" (Dan 6:10-14).

So the king gave the order to throw Daniel into the lions' den. The king told Daniel, "May your God, whom you loyally serve, rescue you!"

At daybreak, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. As he approached the den, he called out anxiously, "Daniel, has your God, whom you serve so loyally, saved you from the lions?"

Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, who shut the lions' mouths so they would not hurt me."

The king was overjoyed and gave orders to take Daniel out of the den. When Daniel was lifted from the den, no scratch was found on him. He had trusted his God.

Then the king commanded that those who conspired against Daniel be thrown into the lions' den, along with their families. Before they hit the floor of the den, the lions had them in their jaws, tearing them to pieces (Dan 6:15-24).

From then on, Daniel prospered during the reign of King Darius the Persian (Dan 6:28).

Daniel is one of the few Bible characters who only has good things written about him. Daniel was greatly loved by God (Dan 9:23; 10:11, 19).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What crisis, challenges, and temptations did Daniel and his friends face?
2. What kind of hostilities and conspiracies did Daniel and his friends face?
3. What part did prayer play in Daniel's life?
4. How was God's power manifested in a place where most people neither believed in him nor served him?
5. What can you learn from Daniel that could help you face a hostile environment with people who conspire against you?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. The youth who lives just like everyone else in his social setting will become impure and will be contaminated spiritually. Daniel and his friends decided not to be contaminated. They made a choice to maintain a lifestyle different from the other youth in training (Dan 1:8).
another person (Dan 2:10-11). But God revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel (Dan 2:19).
2. The person who serves God often faces crises. Daniel and his friends were taken captive from their home and exiled to another country (Dan 1:1-2); were under the death penalty (Dan 2:12); three were thrown into the furnace (Dan 3:19-30); and Daniel was thrown into the lions' den (Dan 6:1-22).
3. God often demonstrates achieving the impossible through those who serve him. The astrologers told the king that no one could know the dreams of
4. Truth should be told, regardless of the pressure one faces. Daniel told Belshazzar the truth, even though kings often killed the bearer of bad news (Dan 5:22).
5. The person who is faithful to God will suffer threats and persecutions when his virtue enters into conflict with the culture of those who surround him. Then his own virtue becomes a reason to condemn him. Daniel had enemies who used his fidelity to God as a reason for killing him (Dan 6:5, 12-16).

6. God loves the person who is faithful to him. Daniel is one of the few people written about in the Bible where there is no mention of his doing anything

wrong. Daniel was greatly loved by God (Dan 9:23; 10:11, 19).