

Opportunity, Apostasy, and Exile - Daniel Chapter 1

Introduction:

Babylon was located in a flat valley between the Tigris & Euphrates Rivers, near modern day Baghdad, Iraq. Daniel 1:2 notes that Babylon was built in the same spot as the tower of Babel on the plain of Shinar (Gen. 11). Babylon mastered the Middle East by defeating the Egyptian armies in 605 BC. Then Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, made three attacks on Jerusalem.

The first attack was in 605 BC when Jehoiakim reigned as king of Judah. Fulfilling the Scriptures (Jer. 25:4-12) In this attack Daniel, and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were taken captive, along with others, and carried away to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also took some of the vessels from the Lord's Sanctuary, and brought them *"Into the treasure house of his god."*

The second attack was in 597 BC against king Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim. This time Ezekiel was one of the many taken captive, along with more vessels from the temple.

The third attack was in 586 BC. This time king Zedekiah was captured and made to watch as the army of Babylon killed his sons *"before his eyes."* Then they put out King Zedekiah's eyes, bound him in chains, and put him in prison until his death. This fulfilled the Scriptures in Ezekiel 12:13 and Jeremiah 52:11. Now both Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and all except some poor people were taken back to Babylon.

The book of Daniel is divided up into two groups, history and prophecy. The first group covers chapter's one through six, dealing with history. The second group covering chapter's seven through twelve, deal with prophecy.

Theme of Daniel is introduced in the first two verses.

Read Daniel 1:1 & 2

In the first two verses we find that Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Jerusalem sets the stage for how Satan attacks God down through the end of time. There are three vital parts to his attack:

1. An attack on God.
2. Against His people.
3. Against His sanctuary.
 - Notice as we jump ahead that Satan's attacks are all the same.

Read Daniel 8:9 - 12

Do you see the same pattern? In verse ten, *"It cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them."* In Daniel 12, verse 3 says, *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."* In the book of Daniel "Stars" are a symbol of God's people, so in Daniel 8, verse 10, we see a power that cast God's people to the ground and stamps upon them or persecutes them. Next, we see that verse 11 says, *"He magnified himself even to the Prince of the host."* This attack is against Jesus, as the Prince or Son of God that stands for His people.

The third attack here is also in verse 11, *“And the place of his sanctuary was cast down.”* Here we once again see Satan’s attacks on God, His people, and His Sanctuary. Notice it also says in verse 12, *“And it cast down the truth to the ground;”* Obviously, this power was attempting to take the “Truth” away from God’s people. In our next passage we jump ahead and see the same pattern of attacks that Satan uses.

Read Daniel 11:31-33

In verse 31 we see our first two attacks. *“They shall pollute the sanctuary...and shall take away the daily sacrifice,”* In the original Hebrew the word “sacrifice” was not there. It was supplied by the translators to give a better understanding. By doing this it leads people to believe it was talking about taking away the daily sacrifices of offering a lamb on the altar. But the word “daily” in the Hebrew means continual. This is referring to the continual ministry of our High Priest-Jesus Christ. The third attack we see is found in verse 33, *“Yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days.”* Here we see the persecution of God’s people. So once again we see the strategy of Satan’s attacks, against God, His sanctuary, and His people.

With this understanding, let us go back and continue with Daniel chapter 1.

Read Daniel 1:3–7

The captives were treated well. They were fed with the king’s food and drink, taught in the best schools. To change their focus of who they were and what their heritage was, their names were changed, from Hebrew names that pointed them to the God of heaven, to Babylonian names attached to the Babylonian gods.

Daniel which means, God is my judge, was changed to Beltshazzer, meaning May Bel protect my life.

Hananiah which means, Jehovah is Gracious, was changed to Shadrach, meaning Command of AKU (moon god).

Mishael which means Who is what God is, was changed to Meshach, meaning Agile or Expeditious.

Azariah which means Whom Jehovah helps, was changed to Abednego, meaning Servant of Nego (god of education).

Read Daniel 1:8-12

This verse is interesting because it shows Daniel’s determination, along with his three friends, to keep themselves pure and undefiled by the Babylonian food or customs. It says that Daniel *“Purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor the wine which he drank.”* Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah must have had faithful parents. Proverbs 22:6 says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* Obviously he had been trained to be loyal to God! It all starts at home!

In foreign countries it was common for the meat and drink to have, beforehand, offered to their idol gods. It could have also been unclean, but, either way Daniel did what was right in God’s eyes and asked for an alternative diet. The Hebrew word *Zeroa* translated *Pulse*,

(vs. 13) is built on the same root as the word *Seed* in the record of Creation, where it mentions *every herb seeding seed*, and again, the *fruit of a tree seeding seed*. Gen. 1:29.

This makes it clear that Daniel's request included grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables a vegetarian diet of good variety, together with good clean water. Daniel and his three friends stood faithful to God through this trial, when others went along with the orders, not wanting to make a wave.

Read Romans 12:1

This verse tells us to *“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.”* It is a proven fact that people are what they eat! We live in a world that is focused on living for yourself and self-gratification. Yet the bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:31, *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”* And in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.”* Even today God desires that we glorify God, through our temple (our body), which means we need to be careful what we put into our bodies, so we can be strong and healthy like Daniel and his three friends were.

Read Daniel 1:13-20

Have you ever gone on a diet? How much of a difference does ten days make? Not very much, yet because of their faithfulness to God, He blessed their health and also gave them *“Knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.”* *“In all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”* God wants to bless His people today if they would follow the health principles He shows us in the Bible.

Read John 17:17

We are sanctified through the Truth. The Bible is our roadmap to discover what God's will is for our lives. Within the Bible we find principles that can guide every aspect of our life.

Read Daniel 1:21

Because of his faithfulness, Daniel is able to be alive when Cyrus, king of Persia, issue the decree to restore and build Jerusalem and the temple. Daniel is an example of what God's people must be at the end of time. They must be willing to be faithful to the truths of God's Word, regardless of life, position, or money!

Read Daniel 12:1-3 & 13

In the end God's people come out of captivity, and they are ultimately vindicated in the resurrection of the Just.

Summary:

When Nebuchadnezzar attacks God's Holy City and the Sanctuary, he tries to subvert God's people and His truth. Daniel and his friends stayed true to God, and God blessed them with wisdom and understanding of visions and dreams. Through the experience of

Daniel, God gives an example for His people in the last days. We are able to understand the prophecies **only** when we surrender our wills to God in obedience to His Word.

More studies for this generation

As a background for studying the book of Daniel, this lesson reviews God's glorious purpose for Israel as His chosen people in Old Testament times, the situation that made the Babylonian exile necessary, and God's purpose in it. Attention is also given to His choice of Daniel to be Heaven's ambassador at the court of Babylon, and to be the recipient of timely messages for His people, upon their return from exile and during future generations. Understanding what the visions and the words of Gabriel meant to Daniel and his contemporaries, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and thus be better prepared to gather from them their deeper lessons for ourselves today. (See Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, page 1.)

A Glorious Opportunity

1. To what unique privilege and favoured role did God call Israel of old? Ex. 19:3-8; Deut. 7:6.

At Mount Sinai God invited Israel as a nation to enter into a special covenant relationship with Him. They accepted Him as their sovereign ruler and promised to be His people and to cooperate with His purposes for them. "From a race of slaves the Israelites had been exalted above all peoples, to be the peculiar treasure of the King of kings."-- Patriarches and Prophets, page 314.

"They entered into a solemn covenant with God, pledging themselves to accept Him as their ruler, by which they became, in a special sense, the subjects of His authority."—Ibid., p. 303.

2. What unique blessings did God promise Israel through the covenant relationship? Deut. 28:2-13. See also 4:6; 7:12-15; 8:17, 18; 30:9.

God purposed to make Israel an example of the infinite superiority of the way of life that He, as man's Creator, had ordained—a living demonstration that in cooperation with Him man can attain to the loftiest heights of which he is capable, and find supreme happiness. To this end God purposed to bless His people with perfect health, vigorous intellect, and superior vocational skills. As a result, they would enjoy the highest standard of living of any nation and become, in every way, the greatest nation on the face of the earth. He would instruct them as to how they might attain these objectives, and they on their part were to cooperate with His wise instructions. To their best efforts God promised to add Heaven's richest blessing, and in life and character they were to reflect His principles to the world. See Christ's Object Lessons, pages 288, 289 Patriarchs and Prophets, page 378.

3. What conditions did God attach to the covenant privilege and blessings? What did He expect in return? Deut. 28:1, 2, 13; 14. See also Deut. 4:9; Jer. 18:7-10.

As with all of God's promises and warnings, the covenant blessings were conditional upon Israel's cooperation. Again and again we find the word "if" attached to the promised blessings. "It should be remembered that the promises and the threatenings of God are alike conditional." —Evangelism, page 695.

4. What sacred trust accompanied the covenant privileges and blessings? Gen. 22:18; Deut. 28:10. See also Deut. 4:6, 7.

"God had separated them from the world, that He might commit to them a sacred trust. He had made them the depositaries of His law, and He purposed, through them, to preserve among men the knowledge of Himself. Thus the light of Heaven was to shine out to a world enshrouded in darkness, and a voice was to be heard appealing to all peoples to turn from their idolatry to serve the living God." --Patriarchs and Prophets, page 314.

A Dismal Failure

5. What unique opportunity did Israel have for knowing and cooperating with God's infinite purpose for them as a nation? Rom. 3:1, 2; Jet. 35:15.

In the priceless gift of Holy Writ, God entrusted His people with the key to heaven's treasure-house' of wisdom and knowledge. As they cooperated with His revealed word, they would realize the most amazing progress in all lines of life and endeavour. "To this people were committed the oracles of God. They were hedged about by the precepts of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience to these principles was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices."—Christ's Object Lessons, pages 287, 288.

6. By what picturesque parable did Isaiah illustrate Israel's favoured role in Old Testament times? Isa. 5:1, 2; 27:6.

"In obedience to His moral law the hearts of the people were to reflect the attributes of His character."—Christ's Object Lessons, page 289.

"This was the fruit that God desired from His people. In the purity of their characters, in the holiness of their lives, in their mercy and loving-kindness and compassion, they were to show that 'the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.' Ps. 19:7."—Ibid., p. 286.

"God desired to make of His people Israel a praise and a glory. Every spiritual advantage was given them. God withheld from them nothing favourable to the formation of character that would make them representatives of Himself."—Ibid., p. 288.

7. How did Israel respond to God's purpose for them as a nation, and to what crisis did this course of action eventually lead? Isa. 5:2-7; Ezek. 22: 23-31.

Instead of the mature fruit of character God sought from His people, they brought forth the same corrupt fruit as the nations about them. Occasional efforts at reform proved to be feeble and transitory, and as the centuries passed the nation lapsed ever deeper into the darkness of apostasy. "From the time of their entrance to the land of Canaan, they departed from the commandments of God, and followed the ways of the heathen. It was in vain that God sent them warning by His prophets. In vain they suffered the chastisement of heathen oppression. Every reformation was followed by deeper apostasy."—The Desire of Ages, page 28.

Again and again God warned His people that the result of continued disobedience would be exile from their homeland. These warnings were fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar overturned the kingdom of Judah and carried the Jews captive to Babylon.

Banished to Babylon

8. Why did God remove His people from the land He had given them to possess forever? Deut. 29:24-28; Dan. 9:5-12. See also Ezra 5:12.

The Hebrew people had inherited the Land of Promise by virtue of their covenant with God, but they came to think of it as theirs by right. At last to impress them with the lesson that the covenant privileges and blessings, including the Land of Promise, were theirs only by virtue of the covenant relationship, God removed them from the land for a time.

9. What was God's purpose for Israel in the Babylonian exile? Deut. 30:1-3; Jer. 30:11.

"The remnant of Judah were to go into captivity, to learn through adversity the lessons they had refused to learn under circumstances more favourable."- Prophets & Kings, p453.

"Had Israel been true to God, He could have accomplished His purpose through their honor and exaltation. But because of their unfaithfulness, God's purpose could be wrought out only through continued adversity and humiliation."—The Desire of Ages, page 28.

10. What did the future hold in store for Israel if they learned the lesson the exile was designed to teach? Jer. 32:37-42. See also Deut. 30:4-10; Zech. 10:6.

God purposed, after seventy years of exile, to restore His people to the Land of Promise, to renew His covenant, and to carry out His original plan for them. All that had been promised might yet come to pass if they learned the lesson that bitter experience was designed to teach. "This promise of blessing should have met fulfilment in large measure during the centuries following the return of the Israelites from the lands of their captivity. It was God's design that the whole earth be prepared for the first advent of Christ, even as today the way is preparing for His second coming."—Prophets and Kings, pages 703, 704.

God's Man for the Hour

11. What personal information does Daniel give concerning himself as an exile? Dan.1:1-6

12. What character and personality traits that qualified Daniel to be God's ambassador at the court of Babylon impressed his captors and won their confidence? Dan. 5:11, 14; 6:3, 4. See also Dan. 1:4, 8, 9, 15, 17, 20; 2:14, 30, 46-48; 4:19.

"God brought Daniel and his associates into connection with the great men of Babylon, that in the midst of a nation of idolaters they might represent His character. How did they become fitted for a position of so great trust and honor? It was faithfulness in little things that gave complexion to their whole life. They honoured God in the smallest duties, as well as in the larger responsibilities."—Prophets and Kings, page 487.

13. What were Daniel's qualifications for being entrusted with a revelation of God's purpose for His people after the exile? Dan. 1:17. See also Dan. 6:7-10; 9:2, 17-19, 23.

In addition to the basic character traits already mentioned, Daniel evidently had a thorough knowledge of God's will as revealed to His servants the prophets in times past. See Dan. 9:2, 6, 10-13. The mature philosophy of history reflected in his book characterizes him as a keen observer of God's dealings with the nations. He was wholly devoted to God's cause on earth.