

# Go to Babylon!

## *Dan 1:1-7*

### Text (English Standard Version):

(1) 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 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. (3) 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, (4) 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. (5) 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. (6) Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. (7) 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.

### NOTES:

- A. Daniel here tells how he & his three companions--Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego--came to be in the Babylonian Court.
- B. In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign (i.e., 605 BC), the LORD gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand.
  1. There is a "problem" right here in the authenticity of Scripture. (Do notice that problem is in quotation marks.)
    - a. Jeremiah says that the **fourth year** of Jehoiakim was the **first year** of Nebuchadnezzar.
      - 1) According to Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar was not even a king until a year later than Daniel says.
      - 2) "The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon)" (Jer 25:1).
    - b. However, according to the Babylonian method of counting the time of a reign, a king's first year of his reign did not begin until after he had been king a year.
      - 1) The year a king ascended to the throne was called "the year of ascension to the kingdom."
      - 2) Daniel, having been trained in Babylon & writing in Babylon, would logically use the Babylonian method of accounting. Thus, the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign in Jeremiah would correspond to the third year in Daniel.
      - 3) The chart below makes this visual:
 

<u>Babylonian Method</u>	<u>Jewish Method</u>
Ascension	First Year
First Year	Second Year
Second Year	Third Year
Third Year (Dan 1:1)	Fourth Year (Jer 25:1)
  2. Why would God send his people away from the Promised Land?
    - a. He had promised Abraham that it would be his descendants' land:
      - 1) "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an **everlasting possession**, and I will be their

- God" (Gn 17:7-8).
- 2) If, as God promised, Canaan was to be an "everlasting possession," why would he give it to Nebuchadnezzar so freely?
- b. The answer is sin.
- 1) God's promises are conditional--God does not fulfill his promises if we sin: e.g., "**If** we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7).
  - 2) God's promise of Canaan's being an "everlasting possession" was quite conditional.
    - a) "If in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me . . . I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste" (Lev 26:27, 33).
    - b) "Those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them (Lev 26:39).
3. From this, we learn three important lessons:
- a. One: God judges sin.
    - 1) Individuals who persist in sin can well expect the judgment of God.
    - 2) "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek 18:4).
  - b. Two: God judges the sins of nations.
    - 1) In this passage, the Lord isn't just judging the sins of individuals, but he is judging the sins of an entire people.
    - 2) God has a long history of judging, not just individuals, but entire nations, too.
      - a) The Lord sent the Flood upon the entire world because of the world's iniquity (Gn 6-8).
      - b) The Lord sent fire & brimstone upon Sodom & Gomorrah because those nations were wicked (Gn 19).
      - c) The Book of Revelation depicts the fall of the Roman Empire because of their sins.
  - c. Sometimes, people suffer because of the sins of others.
    - 1) From what we read of Daniel & his three companions, it certainly appears that they were devout.
      - a) In this chapter, they refuse to eat the king's food--we'll discuss why a little later.
      - b) Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego refused to bow down to the image of Nebuchadnezzar & ended up being cast into a fiery furnace.
      - c) Daniel himself refused to pray to Darius & was, therefore, cast into a den of lions.
    - 2) Others have suffered for the sins of others.
      - a) Abel died because of Cain's evil thoughts.
      - b) The child born to David & Bathsheba died because of David's great sin.
      - c) Jesus suffered greatly for the sins of us all.
      - d) Stephen died because of the hardness of heart of the Sanhedrin.
    - 3) Why would God allow people to suffer for other people's sins?
      - a) To some extent, we can never answer that question, for God alone understands.
        - i. Job suffered greatly--he lost his livelihood, his children, & his health. Three friends showed up to declare that Job had sinned, but Job clung to his integrity & pleaded that God show up show that he could question him.
        - ii. God shows up in a whirlwind & declares: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:2-7).
        - iii. God's basic message to Job is: "Job, I know more than you, for I formed this world. There are some things you will never understand."
      - b) While God only fully understands why innocent people suffer for other people's sins, he

has revealed somethings to us that help us make sense of it.

- c) First, all humans are subject to being in the wrong place at the wrong time.
    - i. "I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all" (Eccl 9:11).
    - ii. The context is why good things happen to those who haven't worked for them--"the race is not to the swift." However, the flip would also be true--evil things happen to those who haven't "worked" for them because "time and chance happen to them all."
  - d) Second, God may be seeking to make us stronger.
    - i. "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:28-29).
      - i) The "good" in v 28 is not some "silver lining." It's not that God takes bad things & turns them into good things.
      - ii) The good, instead, is being conformed to the image of his Son.
    - ii. The Babylonian Exile is a prime example of how God takes suffering at the hands of others & turns it into a growing experience.
      - i) Prior to the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews struggled greatly with idolatry. Over & over, we read that the Jews struggled with idolatry.
      - ii) However, after the Captivity, we never read of such a struggle again.
      - iii) Who can say what Daniel would have been like without the Captivity? Would he have been the "hero of the faith" that we remember him as? Would he have had the courage to go to the lions' den?
    - iii. John Hick, a well-known philosopher, has declared that this is a world of "soul making," i.e., without the pain we suffer in this world, we could never be what God wants us to be.
  - e) Third, suffering makes us capable of helping others who are suffering.
    - i. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:3-4).
    - ii. The affliction of which Paul speaks in context is suffering because of the sins of others--he speaks of persecution he is facing for the cause of Christ.
    - iii. Those who have gone through a specific trial are often able to provide more comfort to those going through the same trial than are those who haven't faced it themselves.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar took some of the vessels from the house of God & placed them in the house of his god.
1. It was quite common in that time period to desecrate the treasuries of conquered peoples. It was a sign of force.
  2. It would especially be fitting to take the vessels used in the worship of a foreign god who failed to protect his people & use them in the service of the god who gave the conquerors victory.
- D. The king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the youths without blemish from the royal family & the nobility to Babylon to be trained in their wisdom & thus to serve in the king's palace.
1. It was quite common for males who served in the palace to be eunuchs, since they would be working in close quarters with the king's wife/wives.
  2. It's possible that Daniel was not made a eunuch.
    - a. A eunuch was not permitted to enter the congregation of Israel: "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD" (Deut 23:1).
      - 1) It is, therefore, possible that Daniel would have resisted being made a eunuch with the same determination that he refused to eat the king's food.
      - 2) However, if Daniel knew that he would not be going back to Jerusalem, would he have fought

- with the same determination?
- b. It's possible that Ezek 14:20 implies that Daniel had children.
    - 1) "If Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it [Jerusalem], as I live, declares the Lord God, they would deliver neither son nor daughter. They would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness."
    - 2) Since we know that Noah & Job both had children, it's possible that this text means that Daniel had children, but this may simply be a figure of speech.
  3. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the best in his court--wise youths of royal stock. Since Daniel is from the tribe of Judah, it's certainly possible that he was a member of the royal family.
  4. The king wants beauty in his court--beauty was highly regarded in the ancient world.
  5. They were to be skilled in the vast knowledge of Babylon.
    - a. The vast library of Ashurbanipal (704-681 BC--just prior to Daniel's day) contained 22,000 clay tablets.
    - b. The knowledge of Babylon was, therefore, quite vast.
  6. The king also declared that they were to have a daily portion of his food.
    - a. The king's food would have likely been food that only he could afford--rare, exotic, fine foods.
    - b. There are a couple logical explanation as to why the king would want the youths to eat his food:
      - 1) In a very real sense, the purpose was likely to reduce their moral barrier. Once they realized that the king's food was rather good; the youths would likely begin to think that many things--religion, astrology, etc.--about Babylon were quite good.
      - 2) This could also very well be a form of psychological brainwashing.
        - a) If so, the king is attempting to remove from them everything about their former life.
        - b) The fact that Ashpenaz gave Babylonian names strongly suggests a form of brainwashing. It was all for the purpose of giving them a totally new identity, one devoid of Jerusalem.
  7. The names of these four youths were changed.
    - a. New names:
      - 1) Daniel became Belteshazzar;
      - 2) Hananiah became Shadrach;
      - 3) Mishael became Meshach;
      - 4) Azariah became Abednego.
    - b. The purpose of this was to remove YHWH from the minds & thoughts of the youths.
      - 1) It was quite common in antiquity for names to have the name of a deity in them.
        - a) "Yeshua"--Joshua (Hebrew)/Jesus (Greek)--means "YHWH saves."
        - b) "Daniel" means "my judge is God"--"el" was the Hebrew for "God."
        - c) Think about how many Hebrew names have "el" in them.
      - 2) The new names Ashpenaz gave the youths pointed to the supposed victory the Babylonian "gods" had given over the Hebrew God.
        - a) Belteshazzar means "protect his life";
        - b) Shadrach means "command of Aku (the moon god)";
        - c) Mesach means "who is what Aku (the moon god) is?";
        - d) Abednego means "servant of Nebo."
      - 3) The purpose of this was to get the Babylonian youths away from the religion of their fathers & assimilate them into the religion of Babylon.