

LESSON 6

We talked last week about how the exile occurred, and, more importantly, why it occurred. One reason why it happened that we did not discuss was the neglect of the Sabbath day.

2 Chronicles 36:20-21 — *And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

In other words, if the people will not keep the day of rest, then God will remove the people, and the land will then enjoy the day of rest without them!

Some may not feel that regular attendance at the worship assembly is important — just as some earlier did not feel that Sabbath observance was important. But God had a different view — their neglect of the Sabbath was one of the reasons they were sent into exile.

Hebrews 10:25 — *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

If the day approaching in Hebrews 10:25 was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, then there is a strong parallel with the exile described in the opening verses of Daniel. But even if the day approaching is the day of judgment at the end of the

world, there is still a strong parallel — there is always a day of judgment approaching.

The Israelites had a day that was fast approaching! And by the time that Daniel opens, that day had arrived.

Daniel 1:3-4

3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

The captives are called “children of Israel” here in verse 3, and later they are called “children of Judah” in verse 6. The northern kingdom (Israel) had been taken captive long ago by the Assyrians. These captives were from the southern kingdom (Judah). But, by this time, many from the northern kingdom had migrated south due to the Assyrian invasions, so Judah included people from both kingdoms.

But verse 3 tells us that the captives were of the king's seed, which would mean they were from the tribe of Judah. Most likely, children of Israel denotes their nationality (both the northern and southern tribes were Israelites in that sense), and children of Judah denotes their royal tribe, which of course was vital for the fulfill-

ment of God's promise to David in Psalm 89:36 that "his offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me." No faithful Israelite could have ever believed that God had abandoned them.

The captives were of royal and noble birth. Why were they taken? This action weakened the subjugated nation. They were also hostages that would keep the Jews in line while Nebuchadnezzar went back to assume the throne.

Daniel appears to have been taken early during Nebuchadnezzar's extended campaign against Jerusalem. Although that campaign eventually ended with the destruction of the city, that was not Nebuchadnezzar's original plan. Had the people heeded the message of Jeremiah, the city could have been spared. That it later had to be rebuilt was a result of both the original rebellion (that led to the exile in Babylon) and the continued rebellion (that led to the destruction of the city).

Taking high born hostages also strengthened the conquering nation. It was considered a good policy to make leaders from the conquered people. Alexander the Great did this, and Cyrus did this (as we will see later in this book). They wanted to assimilate Daniel and his friends. Nebuchadnezzar planned to train them so that they could later administer his rule among the Jews. Josephus says that Daniel and his three friends were members of Zedekiah's family.

How old were they? The Hebrew word for "youth" used here most probably places their ages between 14 and 17. Since we know that Daniel was still serving as a leader 70 years later, Daniel and his companions must have been very young when they were taken hostage.

Plato tells us that the education of Persian boys began in their 14th year. The same may have been true of the Chaldeans.

These young men were without blemish. The ancients (much like we moderns) believed that one's outward appearance reflected an inner condition. We know that God did not allow men with certain physical deformities to be priests (Leviticus 21:17-21). This same Hebrew word is used in 2 Samuel 14:25 to describe Absalom.

(“But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.”) We will learn in verse 6 that Daniel is one of these exiled children.

That they were placed in the charge of the master of the eunuchs has led some to conclude that Daniel and his three friends were also made eunuchs by the Babylonians. Here is what Jerome said on that point:

From this passage the Hebrews think that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were eunuchs, thus fulfilling that prophecy which is spoken by the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah: “And they shall take of thy seed and make them eunuchs in the house of the king of Babylon” [Isaiah 39:7] ... But perhaps the following words are opposed to this interpretation: “... lads, or youths, who were free from all blemish.”

So we know from Isaiah that some of the royal children were made eunuchs by the Babylonians — was Daniel among that group?

Some commentators have said that Isaiah 56:4-5 was speaking prophetically of Daniel and his three friends:

For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

It is true that, unlike with Joseph, there is no mention of Daniel’s wife or Daniel’s children, but whereas their presence would be definitive evidence on this issue, their absence is not. (Rabbinic tradition says that Daniel’s three friends “married and begat sons and daughters.”)

We cannot know for certain, but I think that these four were most likely *not* eunuchs. Why?

First, the text seems to suggest they were taken in the earliest deportation, which would mean that Nebuchadnezzar still had hopes that he could set up a government there that would be loyal to him and be administered by those he had deported and trained.

Second, the king may have planned to use them as hostages, and their value as hostages would have been diminished had he made them eunuchs.

Third, had Isaiah's prophecy been fulfilled by Daniel and his friends, I think that fulfillment would likely have been mentioned.

Fourth, I agree with Jerome that the phrase "free from all blemish" suggests they were not eunuchs, although that phrase could have applied only when they were taken. But if the king purposely wanted boys without any physical defect, it seems odd that he would then mutilate them.

Fifth, the Hebrew word translated "eunuch" in verse 3 (*saris*) may not refer to a physical eunuch at all. The same word is used elsewhere to refer simply to a court official. For example, the word is used to describe Potiphar in Genesis 37:36, and he was married. The same word is found in Isaiah 39:7, which we quoted earlier.

They learned the "letters and language of the Chaldeans." We have already discussed the two meanings of the term "Chaldeans." The Chaldeans (led by Nabopolassar) overthrew the Assyrians and conquered Babylon in 612. The term "Chaldean" can be used in an ethnic sense to describe anyone from the Chaldean tribe. As with "Jew" however, the term "Chaldean" had both a nationalistic and a religious meaning (as in Jewish state and Jewish religion). In the latter sense, "Chaldean" could refer to a group of wise men that arose from within that tribe. The use here appears to be the former ethnic sense. These captives were going to get a crash course in Babylonian and Chaldean culture.

This study included a study of the old languages of Babylonia including two dialects of Sumerian.

Their study also included mathematics and science, areas in which Babylon was very advanced. The Babylonians used a Base-60 number system, the remnants of which we can still see today — 60 minutes in an hour, 360 degrees in a circle. How did they arrive at such a base? Most bases can be traced back to the human hand — our own Base-10 being the best example. But a single hand gives us Base-5, and the 3 joints on the 4 fingers of that hand give us Base-12. Most believe that Base-60 came from an early merger of two groups of people — one using Base-5 and one using Base-12.

Their study also included Babylonian mythology, including their creation and flood legends. (Clay tablets at the British museum show the types of math problems and legends that they studied.)

Possibly the most famous flood account (aside from the biblical record of Noah and the Flood) comes from the ancient Babylonian empire. The Gilgamesh Epic, written on twelve clay tablets that date back to the seventh century BC, tells of a hero named Gilgamesh. In his search for eternal life, Gilgamesh sought out Utnapishtim, a person who was granted eternal life because he saved a boatload of animals and humans during a great flood. On the eleventh tablet of this epic, a flood account is recorded that parallels the Genesis account in many areas. According to the story, the gods instructed Utnapishtim to build a boat because a terrible flood was coming. Utnapishtim built the boat, covered it with pitch, and put animals of all kinds on it, as well as certain provisions. After Utnapishtim entered the boat with his family, it rained for six days and nights. When the flood ended, the boat rested on Mount Niser. After seven days, Utnapishtim sent out a dove to see if the waters had receded. The dove came back, so he sent a swallow, which also returned. Finally, he sent out a raven—which never returned. Utnapishtim and his family finally exited the boat and sacrificed to their gods.

What is the significance of the various flood legends? The answer seems obvious: we have well over 200 flood legends that tell of a great flood (and possibly more than 500) — almost all civilizations have some sort of flood legend. Stories of a great deluge are found on every inhabited continent and among a great many different language and culture groups. Legends have been reported from nations such as China, Babylon, Mexico, Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Persia, India, Norway, Wales, Ireland, Indonesia, and Romania — the entire list would go on for many pages. Although the vast number of such legends is surprising, the similarity between much of their content is equally amazing.

In 95 percent of the more than two hundred flood legends, the flood was worldwide; in 88 percent, a certain family was favored; in 70 percent, survival was by means of a boat; in 67 percent, animals were also saved; in 66 percent, the flood was due to the wickedness of man; in 66 percent, the survivors had been forewarned; in 57 percent, they ended up on a mountain; in 35 percent, birds were sent out from the boat; and in 9 percent, exactly eight people were spared.

The conclusion to be drawn from such facts is that in the distant past, there was a colossal flood that forever affected the history of all civilizations. The worldwide flood is a FACT of history!

The captives enrolled in the University of Babylon — and were subjected to the same brainwashing that some of our universities employ (or at least are accused of employing). Brainwashing has little effect on a discerning mind!

The exiles were all about to be immersed in this pagan culture. They would need great strength to withstand it.

More evidence for an early date: Would a late-date author writing in Palestine have enrolled his Jewish heroes in the University of Babylon for a pagan polytheistic education? The Maccabees wanted to retain their Jewish heritage in the face of Greek influences. Is this the type of hero they would have created? Daniel was

steeped in foreign culture and seemed to take to it readily with God's help and approval. The Maccabeans would never have created such a hero!

Daniel knew that if he were to have any effect at all on the Babylonians, he would need to understand their culture. Think of Paul teaching the Greeks. Would he have had the effect he had on them if he had not been so intimately knowledgeable about Greek culture. Effective missionaries take the time to learn all about the people they are trying to reach, just as Paul did.

Daniel 1:5

5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

The term for "the king's meat" used here is a technical Persian term that is used only twice in the Old Testament (both times in Daniel). It denotes gifts from the royal table.

The king's food would have helped reverse the effects of the siege and the deportation. However, there seems to have been a more devious reason behind the king's generosity. Remember, the king's goal was to BRAINWASH these children. He wanted them to forget their own land and culture and become Chaldeans. His theme song may have been "How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris?"

Did it work? Out of all the captives, only four that we know of remained true to God. Only three were cast in that fiery furnace. (We will discuss later why Daniel was not among that group.)

Our Message: The devil constantly works to change our appetites. He wants us to crave the things of this world. We need to resist the way that Daniel did.

Romans 12:2 — *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

1 John 2:15-16 — *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

2 Corinthians 6:17 — *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

Our greatest danger is that we will be absorbed by the world — by an alien, hostile, pagan culture.

Typically these feasts would have begun with a sacrifice to the false Babylonian gods and would have consisted of many unclean foods. (When we study 1 Corinthians 8 we will see that this problem continued into the New Testament times.) Thus, Daniel and his friends had a dilemma. Would they compromise or not?

But shouldn't they have eaten the food? After all, as verse 5 says, they were going to have "to stand before the king"! Yes, but Daniel answered to another king. There was another king that Daniel would stand before someday.

"To stand before the king" is a Persian term for "royal service." It meant more than literally standing before the king.

PROBLEM: They were educated for three years and then went before the king. Yet later in Chapter 2 we discover that Nebuchadnezzar's first dream occurred during the second year of his reign. Is this a contradiction? No.

It is possible that their education did not take a full three years. Mark 8:31 says that Jesus would rise "after three days" when in fact he rose on the third day. In Genesis 42:17-18, we find that Joseph put his brothers in jail for three days, but we later see that he brought them out during the third day.

A second explanation involves the Babylonian system for dating the years of a king's reign that we discussed earlier. The actual first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign was called the year of his accession, the actual second year of his reign was called the first year of his reign, etc. The first year of their training would have corresponded to Nebuchadnezzar's year of accession.

Another possibility is that they were still in school. This would explain why they were not present when the king first spoke to the wise men.

Daniel 1:6-7

6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

At last we are introduced to the hero of our story, Daniel, and his three friends. Would anyone in the world have considered young teenage Daniel to be an impor-

tant figure at this time? No, but to God he was of the utmost importance. We must try to see the world as God sees it.

Their Hebrew names were all changed to Chaldean names so that they would forget their land and culture. At this time, your name was an integral part of your identity — much more so than today. Very often, as we see here, your name contained the name of your god.

This is not the only time a name change such as this occurred in the Bible. Joseph became Zaphenath-paneah in Genesis 41:45, and Hadassah became Esther in Esther 2:7. Here, Daniel (God is my judge) becomes Belteshazzar (Nebo protect my life or protect the king). The meaning of Daniel's name is hinted at in Daniel 4:8 when Nebuchadnezzar says that Daniel was named after his God, which was presumably Nebo. Another commentary said that Belteshazzar may refer to Belet, the wife of Marduk.

There are several theories regarding the meanings of the other names. The ones given here seem to be the most popular.

- **Hananiah** (Yahweh has shown grace) became **Shadrach** (the command of Aku), which honors the Sumerian moon god, Aku.
- **Mishael** (who is what God is?) became **Meshach** (who is what Aku is?)
- **Azariah** (Yahweh has helped) became **Abednego** (the servant of Nego, probably in reference to Nebo).

HERE'S A GOOD QUESTION: Why do we remember Daniel by his *Hebrew* name and the others by their *Babylonian* names?

Daniel wrote the book, and he seems to favor his original name. Also, it is easier to pronounce than Belteshazzar. (I wonder if he had used his new name whether Belteshazzar would now be a popular name like Daniel is.)

Also, when the book was written during the Persian rule, the earlier king Belshazzar was a disgraced figure — which is very close to Daniel's new name, Belteshazzar.

As for Daniel's three friends, he sometimes uses their old names and sometimes uses their new names. Their new names seem to have stuck, though, because those are the ones that are used during the fiery furnace account. (Again, the pronunciation theory may apply here as well.)

Note also that after the exile, some Jews still used Babylonian names. Zerubbabel means the seed of Babylon, and Shenazzar refers to a Babylonian moon-god. (We use days of the week that refer to false gods.)

Whatever the reason, the Babylonians changed the name of the Jewish kings, and they changed the names of Daniel's friends — but they did not change Daniel's name!

Daniel 1:8

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

Nebuchadnezzar's brainwashing plan had three components:

- Teach them Chaldean culture and language.
- Give them Chaldean names.
- Feed them Chaldean food.

The first two could be done without compromising the word of God.

Daniel could learn their culture without having to adopt it and believe in their false gods. We should never run from knowledge! Would Daniel have had such an impact on Babylon if he had buried his head in the sand and refused to learn about them. We need to teach our children to be discerning, not to run in fear from knowledge.

Also, the Babylonians could call them anything they wanted.

But the heathen food was another matter. This is where our teenage hero and his friends had to draw the line. (These teenage boys drew the line at food!) Why?

Jewish food had to be prepared properly (blood drained, etc.). Also, many animals were considered unclean and could not be eaten. The Babylonians ate pork and horse, which violated the dietary laws in the Torah (Leviticus 11, Leviticus 17, and Deuteronomy 14).

God did not want his people to practice idolatry or to associate with people who did. The Babylonian food would have been offered to pagan gods and would have been served at pagan feasts. To eat under those conditions would have been to wholeheartedly accept the false Babylonian gods. (See 1 Corinthians, for example.)

In his book *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, A. Leo Oppenheim tells us about the care and feeding of the gods of Babylon. We learn in his book that sumptuous food would be offered to the gods, and after the meal, whatever was left would be brought to the king's table as the royal food. God will still be warning about this when we get to the last book of the Bible.

Revelation 2:14 — *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

But what if they just ate it and didn't believe. Would that have been all right? No. God does not need secret agents. Remember Aesop's fable about the bat. The beasts and the birds had a war, and the bat joined both sides. With the birds he acted like a bird, and with the beasts he acted like a beast. When he was discovered he had to hide and only come out at night. I fear that some of us may be spiritual bats. Daniel was not.

Daniel made a resolution and he stuck to it. Was this difficult or easy?

Put yourself in his place. He had been dragged away from his home, and eventually his home had been destroyed. It seemed like God had forsaken him. He had been without much food for a long time during the siege. Maybe God wanted him to eat this food. Who would know, and what would it hurt?

Wouldn't this little quibble about food hurt his chances to get a good position in the government? Wouldn't it hurt his career? Wasn't money involved! Wouldn't that overrule all other considerations?

Daniel knew what was right, and he did what was right no matter what or who stood against him. We need more Daniels!

These four teenage boys were not the first to be tempted with forbidden fruit, but unlike Adam and Eve, they passed the test!