

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## Chapter 18: Daniel in Exile

### Wisdom

Pages 249-250

Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon overcame Judah and carried away treasures and captives. One of his officials selected from the captives young men of royal and noble birth who were handsome and intelligent, and who could one day serve in the palace. These were placed in a three-year training program for government positions.

Among those chosen were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

But there was a problem. The king had assigned them rich food and wine from the royal table—the best in the land—but the young men didn't want to be defiled by it.<sup>1</sup> So Daniel asked the chief official to allow them not to eat it. The chief official feared they'd look unhealthy, and that would put him in danger of losing his head (literally!). Daniel next turned to his guard.

1. (a) What did Daniel ask the guard to do in Daniel 1:12-13? (b) Daniel could have stomped his feet, crossed his arms, and insisted he wouldn't eat royal food. Instead, how did he show tact and respect? (c) On the one hand, Daniel couldn't risk the chief official's life. On the other, eating just vegetables and water might have caused him to lose weight. How did his request give room for God to act? (d) What were the test's results (1:15-16)? (e) Briefly describe a time you were asked to do something against your conscience. Were you able to find a tactful and satisfactory solution?

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<sup>1</sup> The word translated *defiled* is sometimes translated *unclean*, and means moral or ceremonial uncleanness (*New American Commentary*). Among their concerns may have been that the Mosaic Law labeled some foods popular in Babylon, such as pork and horsemeat, as unclean (Lev. 11 and Deut. 14). They may have been concerned that the meat wasn't prepared as the Law required, with blood carefully drained out. Another concern may have been that the wine and meat were at times offered to idols. The text doesn't specify their concern and scholars give a number of possible explanations. Note, though, that the young men didn't reject the food because they considered it unhealthy: in that era, it was the vegetable and water diet that was considered less healthy.

2. (a) According to Daniel 1:17, what did God give Daniel and his friends? (b) God gives us talents to use in serving him and people. When the king noticed the young men's gifts, what happened (1:19)? (c) Describe a time God put you in a place where you could use the talents he gave you to serve him.

God put four gifted young men of faith in the service of the king who had just made Judah part of his empire. He was ready to show that even though he'd let Nebuchadnezzar overcome Judah, it wasn't because he lacked strength to stop it.

## **Revelation**

*Pages 250-254*

Nebuchadnezzar had such a bizarre, disturbing dream that he knew it had special meaning. He couldn't chance being told the wrong interpretation, so he demanded something astonishing: his wise men had to tell him what his dream was before they interpreted it, or he would execute them.

3. (a) Compare the astrologers' response in Daniel 2:11 to Daniel's response in Daniel 2:16. How did their religious beliefs differ? (b) What did Daniel urge his friends to do (2:18)? (c) What can we learn from this response to a seemingly impossible situation that we can apply to our lives? (d) Describe a time you joined with others to pray through a difficult situation. How did having group prayer support help?

God revealed both the dream and its interpretation to Daniel in the middle of the night.

4. (a) Daniel didn't claim to have the ability to tell people what their dreams were. Instead, what did he tell the king in Daniel 2:27-28? (b) Why was this important for the king to know? Consider what the king needed to know both about God and about Daniel. (c) What did Daniel call God in 2:29? Why was that an appropriate title? (d) In Daniel's opinion, did God reveal the dream to him because he was the wisest man around (2:30)? If not, what was the reason? (e) Describe a time God revealed something to you that helped another person, or revealed to another person something that helped you. How can you apply Daniel's attitude to this situation?
5. (a) What was the king's reaction to Daniel's knowing and interpreting his dream (Daniel 2:46)? (b) If Nebuchadnezzar ever thought he had conquered Judah because his gods were more powerful than Judah's God, what did he know now (2:47)? (c) What happened to Daniel and his friends (2:48-49)? (d) How might that fit into God's plans? (e) Describe a difficult time that showed you God is God.

## **Courage**

*Pages 254-256*

Worshipping other gods was not an option for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar was furious when they disobeyed his order to worship the enormous gold image he set up. He gave them another chance to obey, or he'd have them thrown into a fiery furnace.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The furnace was probably the kiln used to make the statue. It had a large opening at the top and a smaller one at the side, through which its fire was stoked.

6. (a) What did Nebuchadnezzar say about gods in Daniel 3:18? (b) What did the three Jews say about themselves in 3:16? (c) What did they say about God in 3:17? (d) What would they do if God didn't do what he was capable of doing (3:18)? (e) They believed God was able to rescue them, but might choose not to. Why would they serve a God who might not rescue them even though he was able? (f) What can we learn about facing hardship from this?

Thrown into the blazing hot furnace, they were joined by someone the king described as looking like the son of gods.<sup>3</sup> They were no longer bound, and they walked among the flames unharmed. Nebuchadnezzar had been wrong: the God of heaven was perfectly capable of rescuing his servants from the king.

7. (a) After Nebuchadnezzar called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego out of the furnace, what did he say about them (Daniel 3:28)? (b) What did Nebuchadnezzar then decree (3:29)? (c) How did God use this event to let the nations know he is God, even though at the moment things weren't going well for the little nation that was supposed to represent him?

8. What can we learn about standing firm in our faith from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

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<sup>3</sup> This was Nebuchadnezzar's description of a supernatural being. We're not told who it was. It may have been an angel or the preincarnate Christ.

## Righteousness

*Pages 256-260*

The Neo-Babylonian Empire fell to Persia. The Persian King Darius was impressed with Daniel, who was an old man now, but still filled with wisdom. Darius planned to put Daniel over the kingdom, but jealous colleagues sought a way to stop him.

They knew Daniel prayed three times a day,<sup>4</sup> which gave them an idea for setting a trap. They and a group of other leaders went to Darius and claimed that all his leaders had agreed he should decree that no one could pray to any god or human for a month, except to Darius, on penalty of being thrown into a lion's den. It wasn't true, of course: Daniel hadn't agreed to it. Fooled, Darius followed their advice and issued the decree.

9. (a) What did Daniel do when he heard about the decree (Daniel 6:10)? (b) Describe Daniel's prayers (6:10-11). (c) What can we learn about prayer from Daniel?

An angel closed the lions' mouths, and Daniel remained safe. Darius's men lifted Daniel from the den and threw his accusers in instead.

10. (a) Darius sent a letter throughout the Persian Empire. What had Darius learned about God from Daniel (Daniel 6:26-27)? (b) What are some of the reactions the exiles and other peoples may have had when they heard this news? (c) Describe a time when God rescued you from danger.

The Israelites were supposed to be a nation that made God known to all other nations. When they abandoned God, they couldn't serve that purpose as a nation. Yet God had even used their disobedience as a means to reach people!

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel 6:13.

## Hope

Pages 260-261

When Daniel had been in Babylon 67 years, he recalled a letter the Prophet Jeremiah sent to the exiles. It said the nations that had scattered Israel and Judah would be destroyed.<sup>5</sup> That had happened: both the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires had fallen. Hope must have arisen in Daniel's heart.

11. (a) According to Jeremiah's letter, how long would the Lord wait to bring his people back to Jerusalem (Jeremiah 29:10)? (b) What was God's plan behind exiling his people (29:11)? (c) What did he want the people to do when the time was nearing its end (29:12-13)? (d) When they did, what would God do (29:14)? (e) What can we learn from this about our own times of "exile"?

Daniel, the righteous man of prayer, acted on God's promise.<sup>6</sup> He fasted, put on sackcloth and ashes, and prayed earnestly for God's mercy. He confessed his own sins and the sins of the Israelites. He expressed dismay over those who still refused to seek God. He called on God's love, mercy, and willingness to forgive.

Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name. *Daniel 9:18-19*

While he was still praying the Angel Gabriel appeared. The decree to rebuild the city was coming!<sup>7</sup>

12. (a) What lesson from Daniel and his friends do you most want to apply to your life this week?  
(b) What steps can you take towards achieving that?

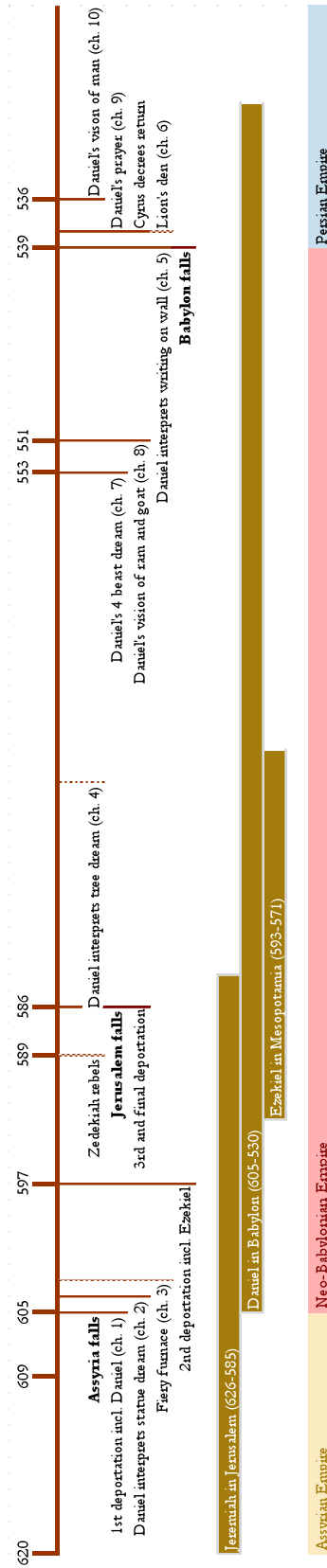
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<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 30:11.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 9:1-19.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel 9:25.

# Timeline



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## Chapter Summary

### Chapter 18: Daniel in Exile

#### **Timeless Truth: The faithful prosper while the faithless fall.**

Judah's best and brightest were deported to Babylon when Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. Daniel and his trio of friends were among their ranks. King Nebuchadnezzar introduced them to their new homeland by enrolling the four young men in his exclusive three-year "How to Live Like a Babylonian" Training Academy. Students were lavished with food and wine from the king's table and invited to enjoy the cosmopolitan pleasures of the world's most sophisticated city. Daniel and his companions graciously resisted. They asked for vegetarian meals so they could stay faithful to Jewish dietary laws. The king's official worried that their meager diet might leave them pallid and weakened, but God blessed their choice with academic success and physical stamina. They flourished and the ruler of the world's greatest empire took notice.

The king awoke one morning having been greatly troubled by a dream. He demanded an explanation of its meaning from his wise men and also expected them to tell the dream itself as a guarantee of accuracy. Failure was no big deal except for the accompanying death sentence. The request was impossible, of course, except that God revealed both the events of the dream and their meaning to his servant, Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a four-layered statue. Its head of gold represented Babylon's might. The remaining layers of silver, bronze and iron symbolized world empires that had not yet risen to power. Daniel's interpretation satisfied the king and saved his life and the lives of all the magicians and wise men in the kingdom. King Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to ruler over Babylon, made high-level officials of his three friends, and worshipped Daniel's God.

This devotion, however, was only temporary, as the king's advisors played to his pride. He built a gold statue in his own honor, and all were commanded to bow down and worship at its feet. Daniel's three friends, Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego, were faced with a grim choice: idolatry or death. They refused to bow. The king was enraged and ordered them to be thrown into a fiery furnace. They defied the king's last chance order and chose to remain faithful even in the face of death. The fire was stoked, the young men were bound and thrown into the inferno. An astonished king watched a fourth man join them as they walked unbound and unharmed through the fire. And once again the king praised their God.

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by Belshazzar. King Belshazzar threw a grand party using the holy goblets they had stolen in the raid of Jerusalem's temple. The LORD sent him a mysteriously written message that appeared on the wall of the banquet hall. The king was terrified...for good reason. Daniel explained that the message said the king would soon meet his Maker. That same night the Persian army invaded Babylon. Belshazzar was killed, and Persia became the silver layer in the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of years before.

The new king, Darius of Persia, gave Daniel a promotion. Daniel's rivals were jealous and plotted his death. They deceived Darius into signing an irrevocable decree forbidding prayer to anyone except the king. The penalty was a single night stay in a cave of hungry lions. Daniel responded by doing as he had always done; he knelt and prayed. Of course, the king's officials felt "duty bound" to bring such dangerous activity to the king's attention, and Darius was forced to throw his trusted servant to the lions. So the king spent a restless night and rose in the morning to find that Daniel was safe and sound in the lions' den. And the great King of Persia worshipped Daniel's God.

While Daniel, his friends and the other exiles were kept in Babylon during the seventy years of captivity, the prophet Jeremiah carried out his duties in the ravaged city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah sent a letter of hope to the captives reminding them that God would one day bring them back to Jerusalem and encouraging them to prosper even as exiles in a foreign land. Daniel had done just that. He watched the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms and remained faithful. In the great Upper Story of God, Babylon had been a detour rather than a destination.