Introduction

Watch the chapter summary

A. Belly of the Beast

Daniel was probably fifteen or sixteen when he was taken to Bab-
lon. He would spend the rest of his life far from home, disconnected
from his family, living in what at the time was the most powerful city in
the world. With walls three hundred feet high, eight feet thick, and
sinking thirty-five feet below ground to prevent undermining, Babylon
was a wonder of the ancient world.

Daniel and his friends had entered a new world. As young, teen-
age men, no one was looking over their shoulders any longer. The
easiest way to make it in this new home would have been simply to go
with the flow.

1. The theme of Daniel is set already in verse 2. What did Nebu-
chadnezzar do with the treasures of the temple? What conflict
did this begin? (This is the theme of the book.)

2. What excuses might Daniel have used to permit himself to eat
the king’s food? How was the Lord working behind the scenes
to help Daniel even as Daniel was making his choice?

3. What are some hard choices you’ve had to make in your life?
How does this account help you?

SIDELIGHTS

A REAL SAINT—The prophet Ezekiel mentions three men as great examples
of personal faith and integrity (14:14-20). One, Noah lived through the uni-
versal Flood. The second was Job who triumphed in great suffering. The last
was a contemporary of Ezekiel, Daniel the prophet. Daniel was a better
“ruler” than nearly all of the kings of Judah or Israel, even though he served
pagans. He did something few in power have ever done. He was both successful
and beyond corruption, not merely in professional ethics, but also in personal
faith. He was a boy when taken into exile around 605 B.C. He probably
worked on behalf of the exiles that ar-
ived in 598 and 587 B.C. He likely ran
much of the kingdom while Nebuchad-
nezzar was insane. As an old man he
was such a valuable civil servant that
the Persians let him keep his job even
though he had served Babylon for over
60 years. Some have suggested that
Daniel urged Cyrus the Persian to issue
his decree permitting the Jews to return
to Jerusalem.
CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Cyrus** - Founded the Persian Empire and allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem and begin rebuilding.

**Daniel** – Carried away into exile under Nebuchadnezzar; given the name Belteshazzar (“prince of Bel”) by his Babylonian captors; cast into the lions’ den for praying to God; prophesied about the rise and fall of great empires; name means “who is like God” or “God is my judge.”

**Darius the Mede** – Perhaps the Babylonian throne name of Cyrus; appointed Daniel to a high position in his government.

**Hananiah** – Carried away into exile under Nebuchadnezzar; given the name Shadrach (“tender”) by his Babylonian captors; and attendant and adviser to King Nebuchadnezzar; lived through a fiery ordeal; a friend of Daniel; name means “grace, mercy, gift of the Lord.”

**Jeremiah** - Major prophet during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah; began ministry under Josiah; imprisoned by kings and rescued from dungeons; prophesied and saw the downfall of Jerusalem; exiled to Egypt; called the “weeping prophet”; name means “God is high.”

**Mishael** - Carried away into exile under Nebuchadnezzar; given the name Meshach (“that draws with force”) by his Babylonian captors; and attendant and adviser to King Nebuchadnezzar; lived through a fiery ordeal; a friend of Daniel; name means “grace, mercy, gift of the Lord.”

**Nebuchadnezzar** - King of Babylon; most powerful king of the empire; destroyed Jerusalem and led captives into exile; suffered madness for four or seven years as punishment for his pride; name means “Nebo is the protector against misfortune.”

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**B. Dreams**  
*The Story* pp. 250-254

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2 ranks among the most significant in recorded history. Nebuchadnezzar was given a sweeping glimpse of four great empires spanning hundreds of years. Yahweh—the God of the Jews—is the God of history.

Take special note of how Daniel conducted himself in the scene in what he said and how he said it.

4. The king had a dream. Perhaps he had had problems with his wise men pulling the wool over his eyes on a previous occasion. So he told them to do something no king had ever told a wise man to do. What was the reaction of the wise men in Babylon to such a request? (verse 11, or *The Story* p 251) What does this tell us about their gods?

5. The idols of the nations had stolen God’s honor and given it to idols. For centuries they had been worshipping the gods of the nations. The Lord was angry with those idols. In fact, everything he did to Judah in the years surrounding its captivity was designed for one purpose, namely, to make Israel know that he, the Lord, was the true God. How does Daniel’s prayer serve as a model prayer for the Israelites and for us?

6. Describe the dream. As you look at each detail, fill in the “Part of statue”, “Metal”, and “Real Life Kingdom”
C. Decisions

Perhaps twenty years separate the story of the king’s dream and the events we read about in this section. Daniel and his friends had become established figures in the kingdom. Sadly, it appears Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten his earlier, humbler response to the Lord, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery” (Dan 2:47)

The Lord chose to use three brave men to again remind the king who was really in charge. He did it in a very public way.

7. Why did the three not need to defend themselves? (verse 17)

8. What was so amazing about God’s deliverance?

9. The Babylonians had carried the Jews into captivity. They seemed to have power over them. But what did this account prove to Nebuchadnezzar?

10. What “furnace” did these godly men fear most? See Matthew 13:42.

D. A Message for the New King

During the more than seventy hears that Daniel served the king in Babylon, he had been a witness to the truth about God. God had used Daniel and his friends to mediate his word to these pagan kings, interpreting dreams and words scratched on walls. Now, under the rule of Darius, God used this ninety-year-old man to communicate to the ruler of the world’s great empire. The lion was a symbol of imperial strength and power; hunted in the parks of the kings. When a ruler hunted the lion, he showed his supremacy. Through Daniel, the Lord showed the Persian ruler that God alone is king of kings.

11. Darius the Mede was trapped by vanity into a decision which placed Daniel at the mercy of those who were jealous of the prophet. List other pitfalls which sin creates for those in authority.

SIDELIGHTS

TRANSFER OF POWER—The Bible says that Belshazzar of Babylon turned over power to Darius the Mede. Secular history indicates that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon, and that Cyrus the Persian drove him from his throne. Can all of these facts agree? Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus. The father left his son to rule in Babylon while he excavated ancient temples in Arabia. This explains why Daniel is ranked third in the kingdom (Dan 5:7,20,29). There are two explanations regarding the identity of Darius. Darius may be Gubaru, a governor who ruled Babylon for Cyrus. The Bible says Darius “was made king” (Dan 9:1). Perhaps this is a way of saying that Cyrus delegated royal power to his viceroy in Babylon. Another explanation is that Darius and Cyrus are the same man. Daniel 6:28 can be translated, “Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” Like many kings, Persian rulers had
E. Unshakable Promise

God’s promises, not our current circumstances, should set the horizon line of our hope. Jeremiah’s prophecy reminded Israel, as it reminds us, that the Lord is sovereign over human history. If he has promised something, then he will do it.

12. Use your Bible to read Jeremiah 31:7-14. In those verses the Lord speaks of the New Testament era. Can you locate statements that indicate this, that is, statements that go beyond the restoration of Judah to its homeland after the Babylonian captivity.

Prophets like Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah could see disaster coming. Repent, they cried, or else. Those who read these prophets see that God’s people deserved God’s judgment. Those who read them can also see that God is not willing that anyone perish, but that all come to repentance.

The next group of prophets—Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel—preached the same message. But it was their misfortune to be alive when disaster overwhelmed Jerusalem. A captive nation was no future event. It had happened. The death of the last reigning king from David’s line was no prediction. It had happened. The burning and looting of Jerusalem and the Lord’s house was no probability. The ashes and smoldering ruins were real.

Daniel walked away from Jerusalem with the first group of prisoners, some twenty years before the end. Ezekiel was taken away with the second group of exiles a decade before the end. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem until the end. Strangely, he was not among the largest and last group of captives led off to Babylon. Instead he was marched against his will to Egypt, the place from which the Lord had once led Israel in triumph nearly 1,000 years earlier. Each of the three prophets not only witnessed, but also participated in, a return of God’s people to slavery in a foreign land. Jeremiah was an eyewitness to Jerusalem’s fall. Ezekiel saw it in a vision. Daniel worked for Judah’s Babylonian conquerors. He probably read the war reports in his Babylonian office.

The children of Israel were God’s prodigal sons. Israel was back where it stared in Egypt before it had kings, or priests, or prophets. When a person stands back and looks at the whole Old Testament to see that grand picture, the exodus from Egypt and the exodus to Babylon stand out. The nation went from nothing in Egypt to something at Mt. Sinai. From something in Jerusalem it went to nothing in Babylon. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel lived with the painful reality that God’s people had shamelessly broken their covenant promise to God and were now again totally at the Lord’s mercy.