

“BEING ABSORBED BY PAGANISM”

DANIEL 1:1-7

Theme: Every believer faces the attempt by the world to minimize differences and synchronize values.

I. THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNFAITHFULNESS IS DEMONSTRATED

-1:1-2

A. *THE GODLY'S DESCENT TOWARD UNFAITHFULNESS*

1. This book opens with the account of the capture of Jerusalem and the first deportation of the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon.
2. It begins: *“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.”*
3. Understand that this was the fulfillment of many warnings from the prophets of Israel concerning the coming judgment for their sins against God.
4. Essentially, Israel had forsaken the law and ignored God's covenant - cp. [Isaiah 24:1-6](#). (Isaiah prophesied about 100 years before Daniel)
5. How did things get this bad? Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of Daniel's, indicated that one of the basic ways they had shown their contempt for God & His covenant was abandoning the sanctity of the Sabbath - cp. [Jeremiah 17:20-23](#).
6. In addition, they had degenerated from *passive* offense toward God to *active* offense through idolatry - cp. [Jeremiah 44:22-23](#).

B. *GOD'S DISPLEASURE IN THE UNFAITHFUL*

1. As a result of these failures, *“the Lord GAVE Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand . . .”*
2. When the people of God repeatedly ignore God's Word, violate it, and pursue their own way, judgment is inevitable.
3. John Walvoord:
“The spiritual lessons embodied in the cold fact of the captivity may well be pondered by the church today, too often having a form of godliness but without knowing the power of it. Worldly saints do not capture the world but become instead the world's captives.”¹

¹John Walvoord, [Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation](#), p. 30.

4. Those items that had once been devoted to the worship and holiness of God were *“brought to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.”*
 - a) Thus, because of Judah’s unfaithfulness, a pagan King was able to claim that his god “Marduk” was superior to the God of Israel.
 - b) *“Shinar”* is a term used for Babylon with the nuance of a place hostile to faith - cp. [Genesis 11:2](#).

II. THE CORRUPTION OF THE UNGUIDED IS DEvised - 1:3-5

A. *CORRUPTION THROUGH DIRECT ASSAULT - vv. 3-4*

1. Once Judah was conquered (in 605 B.C.), and Nebuchadnezzar had paid homage to his god, he then decided that to consolidate his power, he had to have Jews who could serve him in his court.
2. Consequently, he *“... ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and the nobles.”*
3. His purpose was to take the “cream of the crop” and convert them into good “Chaldeans.”
4. These *“sons of Israel”* would have been approximately 14-17 years old.
5. The world, so enamored with itself, looks for those who appear to be “most compatible” with them and then attempts to fully press it into its mold.
6. Notice the standard of the world: *“youths in whom . . .”*
 - a) *“... was no defect . . .”* - no blemishes or of good complexion.
 - b) *“... who were good-looking ...”* - that is, handsome.
 - c) *“... showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom ...”* - having been properly trained and educated.
 - d) *“... endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge ...”* - this refers to the evidence of common sense.
 - e) *“... and who had ability for serving in the king’s court”* - addresses their poise and competency to be around the great king of Babylon.
7. The intention was to then indoctrinate them as to the desirability of the “Chaldean way” – *“... and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”*
8. Most likely, this addresses the issues of the fundamentals of the Chaldean learning - the basics upon which the Babylonians culture

was built, including agriculture, astrology, astronomy, mathematics, and the Akkadian language.

9. This provided them the privilege of studying the most ancient of tablets, written in cuneiform, some of which Abraham himself would have possibly been familiar and from which God called him out - cp. [Genesis 11:27ff.](#)
10. Many have become enamored with what the world has to offer - allowing themselves to be “pressed into the mold” of the world’s system - cp. [1 Peter 1:13-16.](#)

B. *CORRUPTION THROUGH INDIRECT ATTRACTION - v. 5*

1. In addition to the deliberate attempts, the world brought about the more subtle attempt - the allure of the “pleasures” that the world has to offer.
2. *“The King appointed for them a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank ...”*
3. This food would have been offered to the gods of Babylon and dedicated to Him for the strengthening of the king and his court.
4. It suggests the act of worship of the idols of Babylon but was the most luscious and tempting for a young man.
5. This regimen of training and seduction was to last for *“... Athree years, at the end of which they were to enter the king’s personal service.@”*

III. THE CONVERSION OF THE UPRIGHT IS DEMANDED - 1:6-7

A. *THE REVELATION OF THE HERITAGE OF THE YOUTHS - v. 6*

1. *“Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.”*
2. Of all the captives, only these four stand out in the account of nonconformity to the attempts of Babylon to absorb them into their culture.
3. The corrupting influences of Babylon were probably too much for the others, and they were useless in God’s hands.
4. Their Hebrew names indicate their relationship to the God of Israel, and in the customs of the time, connote devout parents.

a) Daniel [דָּנִיֵּאל]: “My God is Judge”

b) Hananiah [חַנַּנְיָהּ]: “Jehovah is gracious”

- c) **Mishael** [מִישַׁאֵל]: “Who is what God is?”
- d) **Azariah** [אַזַּרְיָהוּ]: “The Lord helps”

5. This perhaps explains why these, in contrast to the captives, are found true to God: they had godly homes in their earliest years. (Jeremiah’s ministry was not totally wasted).

B. THE REJECTION OF THE HONOR OF THE YOUTHS - v. 7

- 1. However, the Babylonians, were not willing to allow their allegiance to their Hebrew God to endure. In addition to enticing them with food dedicated to their gods, they demanded a change of name.
- 2. Each name change expresses a contempt for the holiness and honor of their God:

- a) **Daniel: My God is Judge** – **Beltshazzar** [בִּלְטַשְׁאֲצַר]: “May Bel protect his life”
- b) **Hananiah: Jehovah is gracious** – **Shadrach** [שְׂדַרְךָ]: “Command of Aku”
- c) **Mishael: Who is what God is?** – **Meshach** [מִישַׁח]: “Who is what Aku is?”
- d) **Azariah: The Lord helps** -- **Abed-nego** [אַבְד־נְגוֹ]: “Servant of Nebo” (the son of Bel)