



## ***The King of Babylon***

A narrative about how God continues to work on even the hardest of hearts.

## ***THE BIBLE***

Daniel 1-6

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

There is a saying that “hindsight is 20/20”. Share about a time when you looked back on past events, and you realized that God had done something for a reason that you didn’t understand at the time, but you clearly see it now.

*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Judah’s Tale of Two Kings – Ahaz & Hezekiah
- Manasseh -Judah’s worst king
- Reform – Josiah, the boy king
- Exile – The people of Jerusalem taken to Babylon

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: Babylonian Exile**

While the prophet Jeremiah remained in Judah, trying to get those who were left behind to turn back to God, another man was being tested in Babylon.

His name was Daniel, and he faced the huge task of remaining faithful to God while living in a culture who bowed down and worshipped other gods, a culture that even treated their rulers like gods. But Daniel was not alone. God was with him, and he was working through Daniel to reach out to another king and another group of people.

After the Israelites were first deported from Jerusalem, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the best and brightest from the royal family and nobility of Israel be brought into the king's service. The ones who were selected were young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing an aptitude for every kind of learning, well-informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace.

The chief official in the king's court was instructed to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. The plan was to train them for three years, and after that they would enter the king's service. Among those who were chosen were some from the tribe of Judah: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These young men began their training and preparation to come into the King of Babylon's service.

### **Scene Two: A Test of Food and Faith**

While Daniel was selected for this program, he resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. He asked the chief official to allow him to avoid eating things that went against his beliefs. Now, God caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but he told Daniel, *"I am afraid of the King, who has specifically chosen what you should eat and drink. If he sees you looking worse than the rest of the men your age, he will be upset with me. He might even decide to kill me if he finds out."*

Daniel then said to him, *"Test us for ten days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then, compare our appearance with that of the other men who eat the royal food. If you see a problem, you can punish us however you see fit."* So, the official agreed to this plan and tested them for ten days.

When the test was complete, Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the other men who ate the royal food. So, the official took away what the king had provided and gave them vegetables instead. To these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

When their three years of preparation were finished, the king tested them, and he found them to be exponentially more gifted than all his magicians and enchanters, so they entered the king's service immediately.

### **Scene Three: The King's Mysterious Dream**

It came about that King Nebuchadnezzar began to have troubling dreams. They upset him so much that he couldn't sleep. The king, without sharing any details in advance, summoned his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, "*I have had a dream that troubles me, and I want to know what it means.*" The king's advisors asked for the details so they could interpret his dream, but Nebuchadnezzar refused. The advisors begged him, but he wouldn't share a single detail.

Frustrated, his advisors responded, "*There is not a person on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great or mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any advisor. What you want is too difficult. No one can reveal it to you except the gods, and they do not live among human beings.*"

This enraged the king, and he became so furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So, the decree was issued to put every advisor to death; this included Daniel and his friends. When the commander of the king's guard was ready to execute the decree, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. When Daniel discovered what was going on, He went to the king and asked to be given time so that he might be able to interpret the king's dream. The king agreed to give Daniel some time, and so Daniel returned to his home and explained what was going on to his friends. They prayed to God, asking that he would reveal the mystery of the King's dream so they might not be put to death. And during the night, God revealed the mystery to Daniel in a vision.

The next morning, Daniel thanked God and asked the commander of the guard to take him to the king because he could interpret the dream. So Daniel was taken to the king at once, and Nebuchadnezzar said to him, "*Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and explain it?*" Daniel replied, "*No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. In your dream, He has shown you what will happen in the days to come.*"

Then Daniel went on to describe the king's dream in every detail. His interpretation of the dream was a history lesson using the king's dream of an elaborate statue as a visual aid. The head of the statue was gold. The chest and arms were silver, the stomach and thighs bronze, the legs iron, and the feet a mix of iron and baked clay.

Each part of the statue represented an empire. The statue's gold head represented Nebuchadnezzar himself and his empire. In the king's dream, the statue was struck by a rock, and all of the sections broke into pieces. Daniel explained what this meant: that other nations would come after the Babylonians and that, eventually, God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed.

When King Nebuchadnezzar heard this, he fell on the ground before Daniel and paid him honor, and ordered that an offering be presented to him. Nebuchadnezzar said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of Kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery to me." Then, the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He granted Daniel rule over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.

Moreover, at Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained in the royal court.

#### **Scene Four: Another in the Fire**

As the years went by, Nebuchadnezzar forgot about Daniel's God. At one point, he built a huge golden statue of himself that was ninety feet tall and nine feet wide. When it was ready, the king sent for all his officials. His messenger proclaimed, *"At the sound of the music, when you hear the horn, pipe, lyre, and all the other instruments, the king commands everyone to bow down and worship his golden image. Anyone who refuses will be thrown into a fiery furnace."* When they heard this warning, all the officials and people in Babylon fell down and worshiped the image of the king.

There were only a few who refused to do so. And they stood out for doing what no one else would do. Soon, a report was brought to Nebuchadnezzar, *"O King, some of the Jews you have appointed to rule in Babylon have refused to obey your order to bow down! Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have said they will not serve your gods or worship your image."*

The king was furious. *"Bring them to me!"* he said. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego arrived, the king gave them a choice. *"Either bow down to the golden image or be thrown into the fiery furnace."* Even then, the three men refused to bow down. They said, *"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

When Nebuchadnezzar heard their response, he burned with anger. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than before, and he sent his strongest men to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the flames. It was so hot that the men who put them in the furnace died. But when the king looked into the flames, he was shocked at what he saw. *"I don't see three men tied up in the fire. I see four men, untied and walking around in the flames! The fourth one looks like a son of the gods."*

At this, the king commanded the men to come out of the furnace. Everyone saw that not even a hair on their heads was singed. Their clothes didn't even smell like smoke! The King said, *"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego."* Then Nebuchadnezzar made a decree saying, "Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way."

### **Scene Five: Wild Pride**

Although King Nebuchadnezzar was amazed by what he witnessed at the fiery furnace, he still did not follow the LORD. So God gave Nebuchadnezzar another dream to warn him. This dream frightened the king, so He asked Daniel to come and interpret it.

In this dream, the king saw a large tree that reached to the heavens. The tree provided fruit for everyone to eat, shade for the animals, and a place for birds to build their nests. But God ordered the tree to be cut down and destroyed so that only the stump of the tree was left. Then God said the stump was a man who should be bound with iron and sent to live with the cattle in the field. He should eat grass with them, and his mind would be like the mind of a beast in a field. In this way, he would learn that God rules over all men.

When Daniel heard the dream, he was frightened by what it meant. But the king insisted that he share its meaning, no matter how bad it might be. So Daniel explained, *"O king, the tree stands for you and your power. God is going to cut you down and send you away from your power and position so that you will live out in the field and eat grass like an ox. But after you repent of your sins, God will restore you. Then you will know that God rules over the kingdoms of men."* Then Daniel urged the king to turn from his sins to avoid this disaster, but the king did not repent.

One year later, as the king walked out and stood on the roof of his palace, admiring all his work, he proudly said, *"Just look at the great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power and for my glory and majesty."* And before the king even finished speaking, God spoke from heaven: *"The kingdom has been taken from you. You will be sent away to live with the animals until you know that God is the one who rules the kingdoms of men."*

And that is exactly what happened. Immediately, Nebuchadnezzar's human reasoning left him, and he was driven out of his palace to live among the animals. His hair grew long like an eagle's feathers, and his nails grew long like a bird's claws. He ate grass like an ox, and he stayed that way until he repented of his pride. Only when he did this did his sanity return. After that, instead of praising himself, he praised God and said, *"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise Yahweh, the king of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble."*

### Retell the Story

- Where are Daniel and his friends when the story begins? What are they doing?
- How do Daniel and his friends stand up for their faith?
- What does Nebuchadnezzar want from his advisors?
- How does Daniel interpret the king's dream? What does it mean?
- What is the result of Daniel successfully interpreting the king's dream?
- What does Nebuchadnezzar build? What does he command the people to do?
- When Daniel's friends refuse, what is their punishment?
- What happens when they are thrown into the furnace?
- What decree does the king give after their deliverance from the flames?
- What was the king's second dream?
- What happened because Nebuchadnezzar refused to humble himself?
- After all these encounters with Daniel's God, where is Nebuchadnezzar's heart at the end of the story?

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- Why do you think Daniel and his friends took a stand when it came to dietary laws? Was this necessary? If so, why?
- How do you understand and explain Daniel's confidence in being able to know and interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dream?
- What were the results of Daniel's successful interpretation of the dream? What do you think was the most impressive development?
- What do you make of the fourth individual in the flames? The king described that he saw someone who "looked like a son of the gods." Who or what do you think this could be?
- The depiction of King Nebuchadnezzar losing his mind and living like a feral animal is a wild one. What significance could there be in God choosing to punish and teach the king in this way?
- In this story, we see God's persistent effort to help Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, come to know Him and worship Him instead of other gods. Why do you think this was a difficult thing for the king to see?

- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- What do you notice from this story about God's character or qualities?

*Join the Story*

## 1) FAITHFULNESS AND PERSEVERANCE

In the ancient world, the goal of deportation was to take a conquered group of people away from their culture and break them. Then, you would teach them your ways and practices and introduce them to your gods and customs in order to keep the people submissive to you. Throughout Daniel's journey, he is determined to remain faithful to God regardless of what the consequences might be. What can we learn from Daniel about how to be faithful and persevere in a culture that is actively working against faith?

## 2) EVEN IF

When faced with the penalty of death for refusing to bow down to the king's statue, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego clearly believe that God will rescue them. But they also say, *"Even if He does not, we want you to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."* These men were willing to remain faithful even if things didn't turn out the way they wanted. What do you think gave them the ability to have this kind of faith? What would it take for us to remain faithful even if things don't always look the way we would like them to? Is it faith if we only 'remain faithful' when things go our way?

### 3) PRIDE COMES BEFORE THE FALL

The sin that Nebuchadnezzar couldn't shake was his pride. Proverbs 16:18 says, "*First pride, then the crash – the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.*" Why does pride work in this fashion? What is it about pride that separates us from God? And what is it about humility that brings us back to reality?

Pray

God,

*When we consider how fragile and uncertain our world is, we realize that there is no real refuge but You. We make plans, dream our dreams, and hope for things to happen. But the outcomes are uncertain. We cannot control this day or another day. We confess we are often frustrated by disappointments, setbacks, and uncertainties. But even in the middle of our mess, You are working. You will use our difficult seasons and our faithfulness in the midst of conflict to make Your name known and draw more people to Yourself. We cannot understand Your ways, but we are thankful and grateful that You work through even our hardest of days. Amen.*