

Picking Up the Pieces

Lesson Fourteen

Daniel 1-6

Book of Esther

Ezra 1-6

This lesson will cover the 586 years from the fall of Jerusalem until the birth of Christ. The first captives from the kingdom of Judah taken in this turbulent period of time were taken in 605 B.C. The Babylonians finished carrying the Jewish people into captivity in 586 B.C. The prophets foretold a seventy-year exile. By the time the seventy years had passed, Babylon had been conquered by Persia. The Persians brought with them a different view of governing — one much more tolerant of the Jewish beliefs.

The Bible characters followed in this lesson live their lives first under Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian; then under Belshazzar (the son or grandson of Nebuchadnezzar), another Babylonian. Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon. He was killed when the Persians overtook Babylon. The rest of the captivity was spent under Persian rule. There were various kings during this time.

Although the captivity came to a close after seventy years, not all the Jewish people wished to go back to the Promised Land at that time. In fact, the people returned in three groups. The first group returned in 538 B.C. The last group returned 104 years later in 432 B.C.

From 432 B.C. until the time of Christ, the Jewish people were ruled by several different groups. For about the first two hundred years the Jews led a quiet life under Persian control. Then the Syrians conquered them and killed 80,000 Jews and sold 80,000 more into slavery. The Syrian king was a cruel ruler. He was defeated by a Jewish rebellion led by Judas Maccabaeus. The Maccabees were plagued by Syrian attack and made a covenant with the Romans. The Romans did not keep up their end of the bargain. The Maccabees ruled for almost a hundred years. The Romans were the next rulers. The Romans continued to control the area up through the time of Christ.

THE PROPHET DANIEL

Daniel 1, 2

Soon after the people of Judah were carried into captivity, some of them were distinguishing themselves in the land of their captors. Daniel is one of the most famous of these. He is a man of great faith and devotion to the Lord. **Read Daniel 1:1-7** to find out about this remarkable young man.



Which young men is Ashpenaz to bring? _____

What are they to be taught? _____

For how long is their training to last? _____

What are the Hebrew and Babylonian names of the four men mentioned?

HEBREW

BABYLONIAN

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat nor with the wine that he drank. Therefore, he requested of the chief official that he might not defile himself. The chief official said to Daniel, "I fear my lord, the king, who has appointed your meat and your drink; for why should he see your faces look worse than the other children? Then shall you make me endanger my head to the king." Then said Daniel, "Test us, I beseech you, for ten days. Let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink." So he consented to them in this matter and tested them ten days. At the end of ten days their faces appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children who ate the portion of the king's meat. Thus he took away the portion of their meat and the wine that they should drink and gave them vegetables.

Why won't Daniel eat of the meat and drink of the wine? _____

Does the Lord protect Daniel in this matter? _____

Read Daniel 1:17-21 to see what further happens with these young men.

What did the Lord give to these young men? _____

What extra ability is given to Daniel? _____

How much better are they than any others? _____

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams by which his spirit was troubled and his sleep taken from him. Then the king commanded the magicians and the astrologers to come to him and he said, "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. But the thing is gone from me.

Therefore, show me the dream and the interpretation of it." The astrologers answered before the king and said, "There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king this matter." For this cause the king was angry and very furious and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. The decree went forth that the wise men should be slain. Then Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, and he would show the king the interpretation. Then Daniel went to his house and made the thing known to his companions that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret so that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Will Daniel be able to tell the king the dream and the interpretation? _____

Read Daniel 2:27-36 for details of the dream.

To whom does Daniel give credit for revealing the dream? _____

What had the king dreamed of? _____

What happened to the statue? _____

What happened to the rock? _____

"You, O king, are this head of gold. And after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours and another third kingdom of brass which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron and shall break in pieces and bruise all things. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. The dream is certain and the interpretation of it is sure."

Whose kingdom will never be destroyed? _____

Read Daniel 2:46-49 for the reaction of Nebuchadnezzar to the interpretation of his dream.

What is the first thing the king does? _____

Does the king acknowledge the superiority of the Lord? _____

Who is appointed to a high position? _____

Who are appointed administrators over the province of Babylon? _____

THE THREE MEN IN THE FIERY FURNACE

Daniel 3

Nebuchadnezzar, the king, made an image of gold in the province of Babylon and then gathered all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image. They stood before the image. Then a herald cried aloud, "O people, at the time you hear the sound of the cornet, you shall fall down and worship the golden image. Whoever does not fall down shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." Therefore, when the people heard the sound of the cornet, all fell down and worshiped the golden image. Therefore, at that time certain astrologers came near and accused the Jews. They spoke, "O king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have not regarded you; they do not serve or worship the golden image."



In which province is the image erected? _____

Who were administrators in this province? _____

Who will not worship the image? _____

Read Daniel 3:13-23 to find out what happens to these men.

How easy it is to fall out of favor with a king. What does Nebuchadnezzar demand that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do? _____

Will they worship the image? _____

What does the king do with the three administrators? _____

Then Nebuchadnezzar, the king, was astonished and said, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt. The form of the fourth is like a son of the gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and said, "You servants of the most high God, come forth." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth. Not a hair of their head was singed, nor was the smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, "Blessed be the god of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. There is no other God that can deliver after this sort." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Two amazing things happen after the men are cast into the furnace. What are these two things?

1.) _____ 2.) _____

Who gets the glory for these occurrences? _____

BELSHAZZAR

Daniel 5

As noted in the introduction, Belshazzar was a son or grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. He was also the last king of Babylon.

Belshazzar, the king, made a feast to a thousand of his lords. While he drank wine, he commanded that the golden and silver vessels, which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the Temple that was in Jerusalem, be brought to him. The king, his princes, and his wives drank wine in them and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

Something very unusual is about to happen in response to this use of the objects taken from the temple of the Lord. **Read Daniel 5:5-12** for the details.

What appears? _____

What do they do? _____

What will Belshazzar do for whoever can read the writing? _____

Can the king's wise men read the writing? _____

Who is sent for? _____



Daniel read the writing and made known to the king the interpretation saying, "O king, you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven, and they have brought the vessels of His house before you. You have praised the gods that see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand are your breath and all your ways you have not glorified. Then was the part of the hand sent from Him and this writing. And this is the writing that was written: Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. This is the interpretation of the thing: Mene, God has numbered your kingdom and finished it. Tekel, Thou are weighed in the balance and are found wanting. Peres [singular of Upharsin], Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Babylonians slain. Darius the Median took the kingdom.

Does Daniel have good or bad news for Belshazzar? _____

What three things are going to happen? 1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

How long does it take for these things to happen? _____

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

Daniel 6

This is perhaps the best known of the events of Daniel's life. So far Daniel has lived in exile under King Nebuchadnezzar and King Belshazzar. He is now living under the Mede, Darius. Once again he is in a position of high authority and respect. Once again, his commitment to his Lord will be put to the test.

Read Daniel 6:1-9 to see how this event gets started.

What was the king going to do with Daniel? _____

Are the other administrators happy about this? _____

Could they find any area of corruption in Daniel's life? _____

In what one area can they trap Daniel? _____

What decree do they get Darius to sign? _____

They know that Daniel is in special favor with Darius. What provision of Mede and Persian law do they remind Darius of in order to make sure no loophole can be found to save Daniel?

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did before. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. And they came before the king and said, "Daniel does not regard you nor the decree but makes his petition three times a day." Then the king was very displeased and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him. Then these men said to the king, "Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is that no decree nor statute which the king establishes may be changed."

Is the king glad to enforce his decree? _____

Read Daniel 6:16-18 to see what happens next.

What is done with Daniel? _____

How does the king spend this night? _____

Then the king arose very early in the morning and hurried to the den of the lions and cried with a lamentable voice, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God able to deliver you from the lions?" Then said Daniel to the king, "My God has sent His angel and has shut the lions' mouths and they have not hurt me." Then was the king exceedingly glad for him and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den.

The king commanded and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives. The lions had the mastery of them and broke all their bones in pieces even before they came to the bottom of the den. Then king Darius wrote to all people. "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God." So Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Whom had the Lord sent to protect Daniel? _____

What happened to the enemies of Daniel? _____

Does Daniel any longer have to fear persecution for his faith? _____

ESTHER

Book of Esther

The book of Esther is named after the main character in the book. The events take place in 460 B.C. This is 126 years after the fall of Jerusalem and seventy-eight years after the first group of Jewish people had returned to the Promised Land.



Ahasuerus, who reigned from India even to Ethiopia, made a feast for all his princes and servants in Shushan and commanded Vashti, the queen, to come. But she refused to come. Therefore was the king very angry and commanded that Vashti should come no more before him. Then said the king's servants that ministered to him, "Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king, and let the maiden which pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." Now in Shushan, the palace, there was a Jew, whose name was Mordecai. He had brought up Esther, his uncle's daughter, who was fair and beautiful. And the king loved Esther and made her queen. In those days two chamberlains sought to lay hands on the king. This was known to Mordecai who told it to Esther, and she told the king in Mordecai's name. When inquisition

was made of the matter, it was found out. Therefore, they were both hanged on a tree. It was written in the book of the chronicles.

Why is a new queen needed? _____

Who is the new queen? _____

What happens to the men who plotted to overthrow the king? _____

A peaceful existence for the Jews is not to go on unchallenged. **Read Esther chapters three and four** for information on the latest plot to destroy the Jewish people.

Who is given the highest seat of honor? _____

Who would not pay him honor? _____

It is likely that the reason Mordecai will not give Haman any show of honor is because his ancestors were probably Amalekites. Remember that the Amalekites were enemies of the Israelites. Saul's great disobedience came in that he did not utterly destroy the Amalekites as he had been directed to do.

Does Haman want only Mordecai punished? _____

What does Haman want to see happen? _____

What does Haman tell the king about the Jewish people? _____

What does he recommend the king do about these people? _____

Does the king agree? _____

Does Haman tell the king which group of people he is speaking of? _____

What is to happen on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month? _____

What does Mordecai ask Esther to do? _____

What two possible outcomes could happen to a person who approached the king without being summoned by him?

1) _____ 2) _____

Will Esther escape the punishment? _____

Why does Mordecai think Esther came to be queen? _____

What does Esther ask the Jews of Susa to do? _____

Will Esther go to the king? _____

Esther put on her royal apparel and went into the court of the king's house. When the king saw her, she obtained favor. He held out to her the golden scepter. So she drew near and touched the top of the scepter. Then said the king, "What is your request? It shall be even given you to the half of the kingdom." Esther answered, "If it seem good to the king, let the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him." So the king and Haman came to the banquet. And the king said, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted." Then answered Esther, "Let the king and Haman come to the banquet I shall prepare for them tomorrow." Then went Haman forth with a glad heart. But when he saw Mordecai in the gate, and that he did not stand up, he was full of anger. When he came home, he said, "The queen let no man come in except me. And tomorrow I am invited again along with the king." Then said his wife and his friends to him, "Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high and tomorrow speak to the king that Mordecai may be hanged on it." This pleased Haman, and he caused the gallows to be made.

Does the king listen to Esther? _____

What will Haman seek permission from the king to do? _____

Read Esther chapter six to see what happens next.

When the king cannot sleep, what does he do? _____

Who comes to his attention as he listens? _____

Whom does the king ask for advice on how to honor Mordecai? _____

About whom does Haman think the king is speaking? _____

Who must do these things for Mordecai? _____

Do Haman, his wife and his advisers think he will survive? _____

But the king's chamberlains came and hurried to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared. The king said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther?" Then Esther said, "O king, let my life be given me at my petition and my people at my request. For we are sold to be slain and to perish." Then the king said, "Who is he that dares to presume in his heart to do so?" Esther said, "The enemy is this wicked Haman." The king arose in his wrath. One of the chamberlains said, "Behold the gallows which Haman made for Mordecai stands in the house of Haman." The king said, "Hang him on it." So they

hanged Haman on the gallows. The king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman and gave it to Mordecai.

What happens to Haman? _____

THE RETURN FROM THE CAPTIVITY

Ezra 1-6

As noted in the introduction, the people of Israel returned home in three separate groups. Ezra led the second group of exiles back home. The return that will be covered in this lesson is the first return. It is not known for sure who wrote the book of Ezra. Some believe Ezra wrote the books of 1, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Read Ezra 1:1-4 to see how this first return of the people came about.

Who moved Cyrus' heart to let the Israelites go home? _____

Cyrus had a policy of letting the various peoples under his rule serve their own gods. Letting the people go to rebuild the temple was in line with this policy.

Who can return? _____

What are their neighbors who do not wish to return to provide them with? _____

Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites to go up to Jerusalem. All their neighbors that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, goods, beasts, and precious things. Also Cyrus, the king, brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem and had put them in the house of his gods. The whole congregation together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty persons beside their servants and their maids of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty-seven.

Altogether, how many people went to Jerusalem? _____

Read about the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra 3:7-13.

When did they begin work on the temple? _____

What did the older people do when they saw the foundation for the temple? _____

What two sounds could not be distinguished? _____

Was their celebration noisy? _____

Now when the adversaries heard that the children of the captivity were building the Temple to the Lord God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the chief of the fathers and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do." But they said to them, "You have nothing to do with us to build a house to our God. We ourselves together will build to the Lord as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us." Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them in building and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

Does the restoration of the temple go smoothly? _____

The temple does eventually get finished. **Read about this in Ezra 6:14-18.**

Under whose preaching do they prosper? _____

How many animals were sacrificed for the dedication of the temple? _____



REVIEW

1. When did the Babylonians finish carrying the Jewish people into exile? _____
2. Did all the Jewish people return to Israel at the same time? _____
3. Who ruled the Jewish people at the time of Christ? _____
4. What did Daniel request to eat? _____
5. Who interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream? _____
6. Whose kingdom is the rock that covers all the earth? _____
7. Who are thrown into the fiery furnace? _____
8. How many people appear in the furnace? _____
9. What happens to the guards that throw them into the furnace? _____
10. Why does the hand appear and pronounce judgment on Belshazzar? _____

11. Who is Darius' favored administrator? _____
12. Does the plot against Daniel work? _____
13. Whom did God send to close the lions' mouths? _____
14. Whom does Esther replace as queen? _____
15. Who discovers a plot against Ahasuerus? _____
16. Whom does Haman seek to destroy (think big)? _____
17. Whom does Haman want hanged? _____
18. Do either of Haman's plans come about? _____
19. Under which king do the Israelites begin to return home? _____
20. Which of the three groups did Ezra lead back? _____
21. Does the temple get restored? _____