



PERSONAL APPLICATION – DANIEL 2

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“...from the opening words it is clear that Daniel and his colleagues are Jewish exiles sent to Babylon as captives, not so much as slaves, but rather to be groomed for diplomatic positions.”

While the latter half of Daniel is apocalyptic in nature (as described in the initial background material), the first six chapters are written as a historical account of the life of Daniel and his three friends. It is presented in the third person but the author is not identified. Most liberal scholars would suggest a redactor in the 2nd century BC consulted earlier manuscripts and compiled them into what we label as the book of Daniel. Traditional scholars maintain that it is not unusual for a writer to describe himself in the third person when he is relating events that involve others as well. Thus, while Daniel is plainly the self-described author in several places, he could be the author of the whole book as well. In any case, from the opening words it is clear that Daniel and his colleagues are Jewish exiles sent to Babylon as captives, not so much as slaves, but rather to be groomed for diplomatic positions.

It will be helpful if we back up to get the bigger picture of what led to this story about Daniel in order to see the context. For generations there had been a series of wicked kings in the northern kingdom of Israel (also called Samaria). However, in 722 BC it was destroyed completely by Shalmaneser king of Assyria (2 Kings 17). Meanwhile the southern kingdom (Judah) was hanging on by a thread paying tribute alternately to both Egypt and Assyria. Judah, too, had a series of wicked kings who allowed the worship of pagan gods and the desecration of the holy temple, most notably under the evil King Manasseh during the 7th century BC. However, one of the last, good, and effective kings of the southern kingdom of Judah, in the line of David, was Josiah (641-609 BC). He made a number of religious reforms including the removal of temple prostitutes and the banning of Baal and Asherah worship. Josiah began a renovation of the temple, and while clearing the treasury, the priest Hilkiah, discovered a lost copy of one of the books of Moses (2 Kings 22:8). Josiah immediately reinstated many of the Jewish laws including the celebration of the Passover which had not been practiced since the time of the judges (2 Kings 23:21-23).

During this time, Judah had been mostly under the vassalage of Egypt. After the Assyrians had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel they tried to make inroads into Judah, but were thwarted by a series of miracles, at least for a while (Isaiah 35-36, 2 Kings 18, 2 Chronicles 32). Then a new

power from the east, the Babylonians, began attacking the disintegrating Assyrian empire. Since Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II had a treaty with the Assyrians, he led an expedition north to help. Josiah mistakenly felt he could thwart that advancement and free Judah.

Instead, Josiah was killed at Megiddo (2 Chronicles 35:20-24) and many of his reforms were halted. Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, succeeded him but was deposed by Necho II three months later returning from his unsuccessful campaign against the Babylonians at the famous Battle of Carchemish in 609 BC. Josiah's grandson, Jehoiakim, was installed as a replacement swearing allegiance to Egypt. But as a wicked king, Jehoiakim soon let Judah descend into idol worship once again. The stage was now set for the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel to be fulfilled — namely, the complete destruction of Judah (the remnant of Israel) along with Jerusalem and the Temple.

When the Babylonian king's forces (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar's army) reached Judah, they discovered a new king had been installed who had pledged fealty to Egypt, but Jehoiakim quickly changed allegiance to Babylonia when faced with overwhelming odds and the abandonment of Egypt's backing (597 BC). During the 3 year period of his reign many officials were exiled to Babylon, including Daniel and his friends. This is often called the first deportation. Eleven years later, when a puppet king, Zedekiah, rebelled (586 BC), Nebuchadnezzar ordered the annihilation of most of the inhabitants, besieged Jerusalem, and eventually sacked the city confiscating all the treasures and vessels of the temple (presumably, the Ark of the Covenant too). Thus, 586 BC is the most common date given for the final destruction of Judah, the southern kingdom.

Jewish noblemen, craftsmen, and artisans were put to work in the magnificent city of Babylon with its famous "Hanging Gardens," one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Daniel and his three friends were singled out for their exceptional learning abilities and were assigned food from Nebuchadnezzar's own table and enrolled in a three-year education program to prepare them for diplomatic service (1:5). Their names were changed according to Babylonian practices:

Daniel (God is my judge) to: Belteshazzar

(protects the king, cf. 4:8)

Hananiah (The LORD has been gracious) to: Shadrach (I am very fearful [of a god])

Mishael (Who is what God is) to: Meshach (I am of no account)

Azariah (The LORD has helped) to: Abednego (Servant of the shining one)

While a name change may have been distasteful, it was not as serious as the dietary changes which violated Kosher laws. The Torah bound them to certain dietary restrictions, forbidding them to eat fat, blood, pork, horse, camel, rabbit, coney, dog, cat, lizard, snake, shellfish and various fowl (Leviticus 3:17; 11:1-47). The greater significance was the tacit acceptance of Babylonian gods and meal practices if they partook of foreign foods. As a means to keep Kosher and avoid any taint of fellowship with idols, Daniel proposed a test to demonstrate his dietary choices were healthier and would serve the king better. The ten-day test on a vegetarian diet proved successful (1:8-15) and allowed them to keep the faith. This was not so much an endorsement of vegetarianism as proof that God can work visible miracles in a short time when we are faithful to his instructions and commandments.

Because of their faithfulness God blessed these four young men with extraordinary abilities. They were able to learn and understand the Babylonian language, literature and other knowledge with such outstanding alacrity that when Nebuchadnezzar questioned them he discovered that they were "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom" (1:20). What would become even more impressive and significant was Daniel's ability to understand and interpret dreams and visions (1:17). This would prove to underscore the main theme of the book of Daniel summarized in 4:17 and 5:21: "...the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men..."

Daniel would serve during the reigns of several Babylonian rulers until 539 B.C., the year Cyrus, the Persian, assumed control of Babylon (1:21), thus, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 180 years earlier (Isaiah 45:13) that the Jews would be freed from slavery, and not only that, return to their homeland to restore their temple and nation.

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Heavenly Father, your wisdom and power are beyond comprehension. You led prophets like Daniel to predict vast and complicated events of the future with astounding clarity and vision. Lead us to understand the events and circumstances of our time so that we can be faithful proclaimers of your word of salvation to a world desperate to see your hand of grace impacting all history. In Jesus' name. Amen

1. What troubled Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king? (v. 1)

Have you ever suffered the same malady and what was your explanation?

Was Nebuchadnezzar's insomnia the result of something he ate, his life-style, or what? (Numbers 12:6)

2. Who did Nebuchadnezzar think would help? (v. 2)

Explain what job each type of counselor performed (check a dictionary if needed)

Some Bibles translate 'Chaldeans' for astrologer. What does Matthew call them? (Matthew 2:1, 7)

What is the difference between an astronomer and an astrologer?

What does Scripture have to say about such metaphysical occupations? Summarize passages:
Isaiah 47:13-14

Deuteronomy 4:19

Deuteronomy 18:9-11

Acts 16:16-18

3. Why was any attempt at an interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream unrealistic? (vv. 4-9)

What was the conclusion of his advisors? (v. 10-11)

4. Who was included in the execution order? (v. 12-13)
What three steps did Daniel take to resolve the situation?

vv. 14-15

v. 16

vv. 17-18

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5. List the directives we should follow according to these passages:
Luke 18:1

Luke 21:36

Ephesians 6:18

Philippians 4:6

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6. Through what means did God reveal a solution for Daniel? (v. 19)

Notice the verbs in Daniel's litany of praise (vv. 20-23). List the verbs that apply to God's action, that is, what does God do? (vv. 21-22)

What words refer to Daniel's response? (v. 23)

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7. What altruistic request does Daniel ask on behalf of his enemies? (v. 24)

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8. To whom does Daniel give credit for interpretation of dreams? (v. 28)

What does Daniel say about his own abilities? (v. 30)

Who should never get credit? (vv. 26-27)

Yet what daily column in the newspaper do we find next to crosswords/games?

9. Daniel proceeds to describe and then interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

According to Daniel the gold head of the statue represents whom? (vv. 37-38)

The rolling stone which becomes an unbreakable mountain represents what? (v. 44)

More specifically the stone represents whom? (Psalm 118:22 , Matthew 21:41-43, 1 Peter 2:4)

10. In between these first and last kingdoms, Daniel doesn't specify exact names here, but he does later in chapter 5. What kingdom does he mention next? (5:28)

With the hindsight of history scholars can easily deduce the kingdoms predicted by him. Babylon was superseded by Cyrus the Persian, collectively called the Medo-Persian empire, followed by the Greeks and in turn by the Romans. Looking at the statue as an obvious metaphor, what can you say about the *value* of the minerals in each succeeding empire going from top to bottom?

Yet what can you say about the *strength* of the minerals going from top to bottom?

What does that contrast say to you about expanding empires? (2 Samuel. 3:1)

11. David, an empire builder, was aware of God's plans. What did he say about kingdoms? (Psalm 2)

What, again, is the theme of Daniel expressed in 4:17 and 5:21?

What does Jesus say about his Kingdom?

John 3:5

John 18:36

Luke 17:21