

Daniel is a book used as a playground by many who consider themselves to be prophetic, or who read material that claims to be prophetic. The aim in these studies will be to see what scripture itself says, without imposing any theories or presuppositions on the text. If an interpretation is of scripture this will be made plain. It should be understood that I come to this study with no particular millennial theory in mind, because I accept none. The text must speak for itself.

Introduction

The Siege of Jerusalem took place in 597BC. This followed an unsuccessful attempt by Nebuchadnezzar II to invade Egypt in 601BC. Thinking the king was now weakened by his heavy losses, a number of subservient countries rebelled against him. Amongst them was Judah, under king Jehoiakim, who stopped paying tribute to the ruler.

However, according to the Babylonian Chronicles, Nebuchadnezzar responded swiftly and with great violence. He laid siege to Jerusalem, which fell on March 16th (2 Adar), 597BC. The Chronicles say this (explanatory notes in brackets):

“In the seventh month (of Nebuchadnezzar, 599BC) in the month of Chislev (Nov/Dec) the king of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatti (Syria/Palestine) he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month of Adar (16th March) he conquered the city and took the king (Jeconiah – Zedekiah’s nephew) prisoner. He installed in his place a king (Zedekiah) of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he sent (them) forth to Babylon.”

After ransacking the city and the Temple, Nebuchadnezzar sent the new king, his family, and aristocrats, to Babylon along with about 10,000 Hebrews. Ezekiel and Daniel were amongst this number. Only the poorest people remained in Judah. The ex-king was allowed to stay with them, king over almost nothing... he lived for just a short while.

The unbelieving theologians that comprise the Higher Critical school, as they did with most Old Testament records, decided to re-date the book of Daniel to the mid-second century BC, but this is error. It was written precisely when the book says (or implies) it was written, by Daniel, and not be a redactor (one who assembles disjointed records and compiles them as one at a

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later date), during his exile and maybe just afterwards. All of the objections to the book of Daniel find their source in the unbelieving hypotheses of the Higher Critics and may be ignored totally by true believers.

In the book of Daniel we see that Daniel was either one of the royal family or an aristocrat of the royal court. So were his three friends. All four were given new names by the Babylonian king, and they were re-taught in the ways of Babylonian literature, culture, and wisdom, at which they excelled, because of their high intellects.

Hebrew is used up to Daniel 2:3. From then the language changes to Aramaic. The language changes again, so that all of chapters 8 to 12 are Hebrew. It is often thought that prophets and miracles etc., do not occur if they are not mentioned. Yet, we find that Daniel was well versed and gifted by God in these areas, though there is little mention elsewhere. The last 400 years of the Hebrews prior to the birth of Jesus appear to be silent, but this does not mean there were no prophets or that true faith did not continue.

The name of king Belshazzar is not mentioned in any literature or history, except by Daniel. For this reason unbelieving theologians tend to discount his record, calling it either a fabrication or a myth. This is error, for God does not lie or give false information! Whatever Daniel said was true, in every detail. Since the rise of Higher Criticism in the 1800s, however, proof of the king's real existence has slowly emerged. Another 'fabrication' according to historians and theologians is the madness of Nebuchadnezzar. This, too, is factual. Nothing in other sources discredits the book of Daniel, nor should we expect them to, for God's word is supreme and always accurate.

The name of Daniel: Dan = judgment, i = 'of' (not the Hebrew i), el = God. Thus, 'judgment of God'. Many scholars refer to Daniel as one of the four 'major prophets', so he joins the other three in prominence: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. However, Judaism does not count him at all amongst the prophets! It is claimed that a true prophet must speak directly with God, and as Daniel never spoke directly to God he cannot be a prophet. However, just as there is no direct evidence that Daniel spoke with God, neither is there direct evidence that he did not! This should not concern us; we should just read the book as it stands and judge it for what it actually says.

Daniel was captive for all of the exilic period, and stayed at the royal court, because of his social status. Through him, God gave the exact date, month and year of the death of Jesus. The reason why Higher Critics deny the date of Daniel's writing is simple – they also deny the

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existence of God's interventions and thus deny divine activity. Jesus Himself attributed the book of Daniel to Daniel.

There can be no doubt that the Hebrews were under judgment from God, Who allowed them to be attacked and sent into exile by an outside power. They remained in exile for seventy years and went back home to a ruined country. Then, God commanded them to rebuild the Temple. This is an historical record of real events... read it as such.

Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar ('may Nebo protect the crown'; Nebo was a Babylonian god, hence its inclusion in the king's name - Nebu) wanted young men of intellectual and physical superiority, so that they could be trained in the ways of his court and then serve him as officials. This action also denied Judah the benefit of the best minds and zeal, so that Judah could not again rise in rebellion.

Babylon, an ancient city of Mesopotamia, as listed in the Book of Revelation, was replete with people dressed in purple and scarlet fine linen; the city itself was adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls. Yet, it was also *called "the Mother of Harlots and of the abominations of the earth"* . The city ruins can still be found in modern Iraq.

Babylon was founded on a branch of the river Euphrates. The language was a form of Akkadian (semitic language from ancient Mesopotamia), and writing was cuneiform. In the time of Abraham and his travels Babylon was just a simple farming community. But, by the end of the third millennium BC it started to take on a grander role and status. This began with irrigation of its soil and taking advantage of trade along its rivers. It was a cultural centre, and had a number of gods; so it was still idolatrous by the time Daniel got there. Really, he arrived towards the decline of Babylon as a power.

Daniel would have witnessed the amazing Hanging Gardens, built by Nebuchadnezzar II, possibly to please his Persian home-sick wife, who longed for more greenery and water. The gardens were destroyed by earthquakes after the 2nd century BC. In Daniel's time, then, Babylon seems to have been a fabulous place. The name comes from Babel (Genesis 11:9) meaning 'confusion'. The name Babylon is the Greek version of the Akkadian, Babilu ('Gateway of the god(s)').

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Babylon had only just got rid of Assyrian rule when it unsuccessfully tried to capture Egypt, and then successfully recaptured Jerusalem. It is a case of the bullied becoming the bully, as it struggled to begin a new era as Chaldea. At the time of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar reconstructed the illustrious Ishtar Gate and the Etemenanki Ziggurat (something I remember drawing when in Primary school). The Ishtar Gate still survives in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

In September, 539 BC the Babylonian empire fell to Cyrus the Great of Persia, at the Battle of Opis. The Persians owned every other major power but Babylon, hence the battle for total dominance that took place at the riverside city of Opis. The walls of Babylon were impenetrable. The Euphrates ran under the city walls, which were protected by metal gates; an enemy could not hold its breath long enough to get under. Yet, Cyrus decided to enter the city by this route.

Whilst the Babylonians enjoyed a feast day, Cyrus' army diverted the Euphrates, so that the usually rapid waters were only mid-thigh high by the time it reached Babylon. Some say the river dried up altogether. This allowed the Persian army to walk under the metal gates into the city enjoying its feast. Being drunk, the people accepted defeat without a fight. All of this happened when Daniel was there.

Cyrus ordained Darius the Great as a sub-king, and issued a decree to release the Hebrews, which is recorded in the Old Testament. This is the background to Daniel's capture and life.

Verses 1&2

1.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.

2.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.

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The Book begins with the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. We are told that the Babylonian king was not successful by his own power and military might, but because *“the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand”*.

Jehoiakim came to power because the Egyptian masters of Jerusalem deposed his younger brother, Jehoahaz (or Shallum); their father was Josiah. At that time his name was Eliakim, but he changed it to Jehoiakim (‘he whom Jehovah has set up’) when he became king at age 25 in 609 BC. His deposed brother was exiled to Egypt, where he died.

Jerusalem was ruled by Egypt, paying heavy tributes annually. Jeremiah called upon the new king to repent and obey God’s laws. Another prophet, Uriah ben Shemaiah, was put to death by Jehoiakim. When the Babylonians defeated Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC, Jehoiakim changed allegiance to Babylon, and paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar II instead. But, when the Babylonian king again attacked Egypt and lost, in a battle lasting three years, Jehoiakim again changed sides, back to Egypt! Hence, the anger of Nebuchadnezzar and his final siege of Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died in 598 BC and was succeeded by his son Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin) who reigned for just three months.

We can see that Jehoiakim was not a good king obedient to the Lord, and this is why God gave him over to Nebuchadnezzar. It is not just the fate of bad kings – Christians can expect God to allow them to know dangers and adverse situations if they do not obey Him. At times He does not just allow these things to happen, but He commands them, as He did in the case of Jehoiakim. No man can resist these divine edicts. Once God declares His hand in judgment He will not remove it. The judgment must occur. That is why Christians must ensure their lives are holy, so as not to bring the judgment of God upon their own heads.

The text tells us that Nebuchadnezzar also took the gold and other riches from the Temple, putting them into the temple of his own gods in Babylon. God will always remove unfruitful branches. Again, this is reason to be loyal to the Lord and not to wander into areas of unbelief and sin.

We are told that Nebuchadnezzar took the gold *“into the land of Shinar to the house of his god”*. Shinar means “country of two rivers”, or Babylonia/Chaldea. The ‘two rivers’ are the Euphrates and the Tigris. The Jerusalem Temple gold and valuables were put into the *“treasure house of his god”*.

The Jerusalem Temple had its own treasure or storehouse, underneath the building. Temple artifacts such as plates and lamps, priestly clothing, etc., were all kept there until used in

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ceremonies and then returned for safekeeping. It is likely that as Nebuchadnezzar put the temple gold into his own temple, he must have used them for worship of his pagan gods. Otherwise the gold would have been put into his personal coffers for his own use.

Verses 3-5

1.

And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;

2.

Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.

3.

And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar did not waste time. He commanded his "master of the eunuchs", Ashpenaz, to discover all the Hebrew king's children and young family members. The term 'princes' can literally mean sons of the king, or his nephews, or some other aristocratic young man. 'Children', ben, means young men and women, or children.

Ashpenaz ('I will make prominent the sprinkled' or, 'the horse's nose!'), was the chief eunuch. Though the term 'eunuch' is set out in another study, we will define its meaning here, too. An eunuch was a man castrated by an Eastern king so that he could look after his harem. The chief or prince eunuch, 'Kislar Aga', could also be in charge of the king's children, though the term 'chief eunuch' also applied to any high official or minister in the royal court. In this text we cannot be sure if Ashpenaz was castrated or not, because ministers were often not subjected to this cruel fate. Thus, the man may have indeed been a castrated person, or the title is used of him as a prince or minister. He certainly had high office.

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'Princes' in verse 3 refer to young noblemen of the Hebrew royal court, who were lower than the king's children but aristocrats. In Nebuchadnezzar's command we see a trace of what later would become a fascist attitude towards children – who had to be pure-born and without any obvious illness or disability. The king wanted Ashpenaz to choose only the young men who were strong, without blemish, well endowed with wisdom, with a knowledge of science, to finally join the king's household as his close adopted family. To have knowledge of science, Daniel had to be an older teenager.

At that time Babylon was already known for its cultural greatness, which included expertise in science, astronomy and mathematics. So much for the erroneous belief of some today in a 'simple faith'! The children, then, had to be 'without blemish': that includes not just physical deformity or illness, in particular smallpox, but immorality. They had to be of the highest moral standing. They also had to be "well favoured", or handsome. The king only wanted 'perfect specimens' for his court!

They had to be, even at that young age (including up to late teenage), skilled in "all wisdom". That is, in warcraft, administration, shrewdness, religion and ethics. Their perception, understanding and knowledge had to be well-honed or 'cunning'. They had to understand 'science'. In this age, the word 'science' is used in its original and basic meaning: study, knowledge and the ability to think deeply on subjects. They also had to have the *"ability in them to stand in the king's palace"* without embarrassing him.

Once the relevant youths had been chosen they were to be taught how to speak and think in Chaldean. Thus, the language of the Babylonians would hopefully slowly replace their use of Hebrew, so that they would become fully integrated into society, becoming Chaldean and promoting the royal household view. With the language training would come a full training in all things Babylonian, including its culture and sciences. We can see from this that Daniel was no lowly mind. He and his fellow nobles were of the highest intellect, sharp-minded, and well able to study and think in scientific terms. They were not 'simple souls'! Yet, they were true to their God, Jehovah. To say that belief in God is proof of a low intellect is absolute nonsense and propaganda!

To make sure these youngsters had the very best, they were daily given the same foods and wines the king ate and drank. Modern day Christians should not think wine was non-alcoholic. This was true alcoholic wine, and wine was a normal drink, just as it was at the time of Jesus. The reason the king gave them such good food and drink was so they would grow well and strong, to look nourished and sturdy when finally presented at court. They were to be the 'best

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of the best’.

Again, this is very like the mindframe of dictators in every age; a kind of brainwashing. By giving youngsters only the best food and drink, and the very best of everything, it was hoped that they would then be totally loyal to the regime, because they linked well-being with the king and his ways. The same happens today amongst socialist officials, whether in Britain, the USA or China – if they associate their status and life with their leaders and his dogma, they will never stray far from him, and will always support and propagate his teachings. This was the aim of the clever Nebuchadnezzar.

Verses 6&7

1.

Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

2.

Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego.

We are now told the names of just some of the royal children and old Hebrew royal household, names that have survived three millennia in fame. They were Daniel (‘God is my judge’), Hananiah (‘God has favoured’), Mishael (‘who is what God is’) and Azariah (Jehovah has helped)... only we do not usually associate them with these names, which were changed to suit the king’s aim of making them new-Babylonians. Note how each of their Hebrew names is very well applied.

Ashpenaz was instructed to give every Hebrew child of high birth another name, to complete their change into Babylonians. Daniel was renamed ‘Belteshazzar’ (‘lord of the straitened’s treasure’). Hananiah became ‘Shadrach’ (‘royal’, or the ‘great scribe’); Mishael became ‘Meshach’ (‘guest of a king’); and Azariah was renamed ‘Abed-nego’ (‘servant of Nebo’, a Babylonian god of wisdom and writing). It seems the new names were to reflect their new status and role in the royal court in three years’ time.

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Note how modern leaders adorn their favoured few with new roles and titles. See how governments bestow favours and titles on men and women who they believe to be faithful to their political and social stance. It is a method of control.

Verses 8-10

1.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

2.

Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

3.

And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

Verse 8 tells us that Daniel was a true Hebrew and a godly young man. He refused the king's meat and wine. Behind this is the fact that the king ate and drank what was dedicated to other gods, possibly things banned by Judaistic custom and law. Verse 9 says that Daniel was favoured by Ashpenaz, who showed him "tender love", racham. That is, Ashpenaz showed Daniel compassion.

Because of this, he spoke to Daniel and cautioned him to be careful. He told Daniel that he was afraid of the king, who had instructed him to give only the best to the young aristocrats. He was afraid that when the time came to present them to court, they would be emaciated and unwell, because they did not eat and drink the designated food. If they refused the food and drink, he would likely lose his own head as a punishment.

This gives us another clue as to Nebuchadnezzar's totalitarian character. He really was a fascist before the term was coined, a man who ruled by fear and might, who threatened instead of

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encouraged.

Verses 11-17

1.

Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

2.

Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

3.

Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

4.

So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

5.

And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

6.

Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

7.

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

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Ashpenaz had appointed a man named Melzar, an officer of the court, as supervisor over Daniel and his three friends. Daniel took him aside and offered him a compromise. 'Put us to the test,' he said, 'Give us ten days. In that time we will eat vegetables (pulses) and drink only water. Then, after ten days, check to see if we are still healthy. Then make your decision concerning us.' Melzar agreed to this idea.

Ten days later, Daniel and his three friends looked even healthier than the others who remained on the king's diet! They had even put on weight. So, Melzar did not give them any more of the king's diet and only fed them vegetables. Not only did the four become healthier, but they grew in knowledge, skills and wisdom.

No, this is not a command for us all to become vegetarians! This was a circumstance applied only to Daniel and his friends, for a particular purpose – that they did not fall into acting like the pagans around them, and to show God would keep them.

Though young, Daniel *"had understanding in all visions and dreams."* Thus, he was gifted by God in these two spiritual activities. Visions, *chazown*, are divine communications/prophesy from God. Dreams, *chalowm*, are dreams with prophetic meaning. Again, this does not imply that modern day Christians are given permanent use of these spiritual gifts. We must read this text in the way it is given: as a fact of life for Daniel, not as a general rule for all who believe God. In this way, Daniel was very similar in life to Joseph, in the way God used him in the matter of visions and dreams.

Verses 18-21

1.

Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

2.

And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

3.

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And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

4.

And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.

After three years, Ashpenaz brought Daniel and the three friends before Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them (in Chaldean) and discovered the four young men were superior to any, Babylonian or Hebrew, he had come across before. So, they were immediately accepted to accompany the king at court.

In fact, the king found them “ten times better” than the greatest minds in the kingdom. The Babylonian minds were those of magicians and astrologers who, in those times, were the usual advisers to kings. That is, they had occult powers. We are then told that Daniel lived into the first year’s reign of king Cyrus – thus he lived through the whole period of the exile. This is the background to Daniel, a young man with a brilliant intellect and godly gifts.

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