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Introduction to the Book of Daniel

We come now to another important prophetic witness which God gave to His people, the book of Daniel! When we look at the prophetic books in chronological order we notice that it is the twelfth book:

- Joel written to Judah circa 845 BC.
- Jonah written on account of Nineveh circa 780 BC.
- Amos written to Israel circa 765 BC.
- Hosea written to Israel circa 750 BC.

- Isaiah written to Judah circa 740 BC.
- Micah written to Judah circa 735 BC.
- Nahum written to Judah circa 650 BC.
- Jeremiah/Lamentations written to Judah circa 627 BC.
- Zephaniah written to Judah circa 622 BC.
- Habakkuk written to Judah circa 605 BC.

There are times in our lives when we sin against a person and so are in the position of asking for their forgiveness. Yet there are other times when someone is offended by us and we literally have done nothing wrong. In this case, it might surprise you to discover that we still aren't off the hook. Christ declared it this way:

Matthew 5:23-24, "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

The book of Daniel is a beautiful example of the Lord doing this with regard to His people, as we have seen, God did NOT wrong His people with the exile; God's people brought it upon themselves! Recall that when the Lord established the nation, He gave this and similar warnings:

Leviticus 26:14-16a, 17: "But if you do not obey Me [as a nation] and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you... I will set My face against you so that you shall be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is pursuing you."

From the beginning of the nation, God told His corporate people that if king and nation rebelled, the nation ultimately would be wiped out! In fact, it is this very truth that Daniel referenced in his prayer of confession in:

Daniel 9:11-13a, "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Thy law and turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done *anything* like what was done to Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses [~Leviticus 26], all this calamity has come on us..."

So indeed, the exile was laid corporately at the feet of both King and Nation! Individually, the individual servant of the Lord still was the apple of God's eye; the Lord would never abandon

His people (Leviticus 26:44-45)! But corporately, God would reject the nation forever!

So God did NOT wrong His people with the exile; the nation brought it upon itself! Yet that didn't stop God's people from feeling let down by the Lord. That didn't stop them from raising the questions and the complaints:

- How could God have abandoned us? I thought He loved us!
- How is it that the Lord let us go? Is He unfaithful? Untrustworthy?

Daniel details God's answer to His exiled people; to those living as strangers in this land and wondering how God could have allowed them to suffer as they have. As we shall see in our study of Daniel, the Lord gives a glorious answer!

The Prophet, the Date, and Setting

Daniel 1:1-2, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them [the golden vessels] to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god."

With this historical reference, there is little question as to the era in which Daniel (whose name means "God is my judge") lived and served. Accordingly, consider with me the historical background of Daniel. Following the death of Josiah (609 BC), we pick up the history with his son, Jehoahaz.

Jehoahaz (609 BC)

2 Kings 23:31, "Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah."

Though he was the fourth born son of Josiah, nevertheless upon his father's death, Jehoahaz ascended to the throne of Judah. Yet, Jehoahaz' reign was short-lived, lasting only three months!

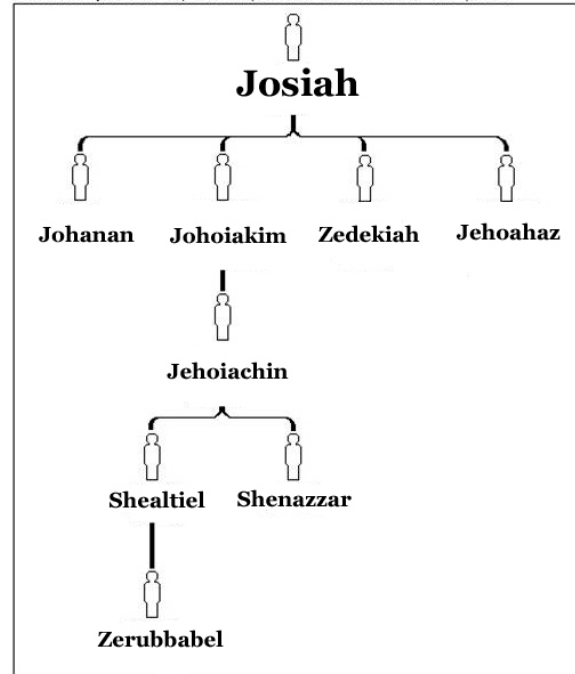
For whatever reason, Neco (the king of Egypt who killed Josiah) did not like Jehoahaz and so summoned him to the Syrian town of Riblah (cf. 1 Kings 23:33). Here Jehoahaz was captured, put in chains, and brought to Egypt where he died at a young age (cf. Jeremiah 22:10-12). Why Jehoahaz was deemed a threat to Egypt we really do not know. Most likely, Jehoahaz looked like his father and so posed a risk of future rebellion. Think of it: the name that Jeremiah attributed to him, "Shallum," means, "retribution!" Yet this is pure conjecture. Regardless, after Jehoahaz' three month reign, his older brother, Jehoiakim (the king referenced here in Daniel), was placed on the throne...

Jehoiakim (608-598 BC)

2 Kings 22:34, "And Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim."

Initially, Judah was placed under heavy tribute to Egypt! Yet as you know, things were soon going to change as the Babylonians were on the rise! In fact, throughout the summer months of 608 to 606 BC, Egyptian and Babylonian forces engaged in a variety of skirmishes which basically did nothing. *During this time*, Jehoiakim remained subordinate to Egypt. Now shockingly he did NOT spend his time praying or laboring to protect God's people and the nation. RATHER, the first three years of his reign was spent focusing upon himself! It is unbelievable! At this time of uncertainty, want, and difficulty, Jehoiakim built an extravagant palace with forced labor- which means he enslaved his own people (Jeremiah 22:13-19)! Furthermore, he allowed Josiah's reforms to lapse and played into the hands of those who had always opposed them. As such, during his reign the wicked practices of Manasseh were reintroduced to the people of God. Public morality deteriorated! The strong and powerful were given full license to abuse the poor. And one of the MOST important elements of the Covenant, the care of the weak and hurting- was completely ignored!

However, in 605 BC the Political Landscape changed quite dramatically, the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, won a decisive victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish! The Egyptian forces retreated to Hamath where they were defeated yet again! Now, Palestine lay vulnerable with no force to resist Babylon. Accordingly, in 605 BC the Babylonians attacked, which is what we read about in Daniel 1.



Daniel 1:1-2, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah [which again would have been 605 BC], Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god."

At first Jehoiakim resisted which resulted in the commencement of a siege referenced here. Yet he was a weak leader and soft. However, in no time he surrendered! This gave both the Judean monarchy and the nation a vassal status before Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). This meant that not only from this point forward Judah had to pay tribute to Babylon, but the Babylonian gods and religion had to be adopted and practiced in Israel! So much for covenant loyalty and service to God! Now the first tribute that was to be paid to Nebuchadnezzar was in the form of gold and people!

Daniel 1:3-7, "Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of wisdom*, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Then the commander of the officials assigned *new* names to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abed-nego."

This was a common practice in the ancient world; transporting! The primary purpose behind this activity was to ensure the peace and submission of a conquered nation. This is how it worked: When a nation was subjugated in the ancient world, the wealthy, educated, powerful, and upper class were forcibly taken from their land and re-shuffled to another conquered territory. See, it was from these classes of people that rebellion typically arose when a nation was conquered. Accordingly, by removing these people from their homeland, the fight would be taken out of them because no one wants to die for a land that isn't theirs.

Now aside from assuring the tranquility and peace of a conquered land, there were other benefits to transporting. The conquering nation also received an influx of talent and ability from the youth of these lands. By taking them in, educating, and brainwashing them, the government, culture, and society of the conquering nation would take huge leaps forward. This is what happened with Daniel and his three friends.

With that, let me finish the story at least from the perspective of Jehoiakim. Now as a vassal and so a puppet king, things were difficult for both the Jehoiakim and the nation. When Egypt won a decisive victory over Nebuchadnezzar in 600/599 BC, Jehoiakim rebelled against

Babylon! He shifted allegiances.

Initially Nebuchadnezzar was too busy in his own country to take action against Jerusalem. And so he sent bands of marauders to plunder Judah. (Jeremiah 35:11; 2 Kings 24:2) Yet by 598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar had addressed the problems which had kept him occupied. Accordingly “in the summer when the kings go to battle,” he marched on Judah. Before Nebuchadnezzar could get there, Jehoiakim died. His son, Jehoiachin, who had ascended to the throne was left to deal with the impending threat of the Babylonians, a threat we’ll pick up in the book of Ezekiel!

Now we are able to set the date-range for this book. The history of Daniel obviously begins in 605 BC. Yet based on Daniel 9 where Daniel is studying the book of Jeremiah and notices that that the prophecy of a 70 year exile was completed.

Daniel 9:1-2, “In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely*, seventy years.”

That pushes the date range of this prophecy at least to the early part of the 530s BC. And because Daniel is serving the Lord strong at this time in Babylon (which now was Persia), most scholars place the date range of Daniel from 605 BC to the late 530s BC. In light of this and the fact that Daniel obviously was old enough to be a leader of his companions and interact intelligibly with Ashpenaz (the Babylonian official who was charged with the care of Daniel and his friends), it is believed that Daniel would have been a young man in 605 BC- twelve to fifteen years of age!

Notice the structure of this book. The first six chapters are relatively simple stories of faith under pressure. But then we come to the second half of Daniel, 7-12, and our skill as Bible students is put to the test! Tremper Longman wrote this:

While children resonate with the lessons of Daniel 1–6, seasoned Bible scholars scratch their heads over Daniel 7–12 with the move from simple stories to obscure apocalyptic visions. (Longman, 1999, p. 19)

Like Isaiah who masterfully crafted his prophecy, Daniel most likely penned this prophecy toward the end of his life. As such, it stands as a masterpiece of literary genius. Notice the chiasmic structure:

Daniel 1-2:4a is written in Hebrew
Daniel 2:4b-7:28 is written in Aramaic!!
Daniel 8-12 is written in Hebrew

The book itself is one large Chiasm! Now it is interesting to note that Aramaic was an

international language as early as the eighth century B.C. That means that the middle content of this prophecy (the focus of this book) was meant for an international audience! In other words, at this point Daniel knew the world was watching! Furthermore, it also means that the two main divisions of this book (Daniel 1-6 and 7-12) are united.

Daniel 7-12 wasn't written four hundred years later and then added to the book (which is what liberal scholars believe)! The two halves are clearly linked (for the Aramaic of chapters 2-6 bleeds into the second half of the book, chapter 7); whoever wrote the first half obviously wrote the second!

Now looking at the "International section" of this book (chapters 2-7) it is interesting to note that this section also is chiasmic in its structure; following the pattern of A, B, C, C¹, B¹, A¹- which means the emphasis of this middle section is on Daniel 4-5 and *God's Judgment on World Rulers!* Notice the chiasm:

Daniel 2: Four World Empires
Daniel 3: Narratives of a Mighty Deliverance
Daniel 4 } **God's Judgment on World**
Daniel 5 }
Daniel 6: Narratives of a Mighty Deliverance
Daniel 7: Four World Empires

This is such an important message both for God's people and any and all nations and/or powers that would oppose or abuse them. Indeed worldly leaders: *"Eat, drink, and be merry!" For some day God will require of you your soul and you will stand before the Great Judge and answer for your actions against Christ!* (Luke 12:20)

Note further that Daniel 1 sets the scene in Babylon for the rest of the book. Daniel 2-7 then describes world history from the perspective of God. Then Daniel 8-12 repeats the same history but from the viewpoint of God's people in particular, and with a view to explaining God's purposes for them (this is the literary tool of Progressive Parallelism.¹ The imagery suggested by one Bible commentator is beautiful, Sinclair Ferguson wrote:

One might liken the structure [of Daniel] to a spiral staircase, turning around the same central point on more than one occasion, yet rising higher and higher at the same time. (Ferguson, 1988, p. 17)

From all of this we conclude that the book of Daniel was written by the prophet who bears its name (cf. Daniel 7:2; 8:1; 9:2; 10:2) in order to proclaim an important message both to the people of God AND their oppressors! (In the coming months we are going to examine that message in detail. However for now, let me introduce you to one of the more important themes of this book!)

The Sovereignty of God over Life

Behold a most emotional and brutal question raised by the Psalmist who clearly was in exile.

Psalms 137:1-4, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it we hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, and our tormentors mirth, *saying*, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion.’ How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”

What a phenomenal question! Recall in our study of Habakkuk we read of the New Song which God intended His people to sing while in Exile (Habakkuk 3; cf. Psalms 40:3). When times are good and the land knows peace (which it did when Habakkuk wrote his Psalm), it is easy to talk about what we ought to say and do when times are difficult. But to be in the crucible, that is quite another thing!

So how can the Christian, whose citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), sing the Lord’s song as an exile here on earth (1 Peter 1:1)? How can we sing when the world is falling apart around us? How can we sing when God seems to have let us down? Consider with me one of the main messages of Daniel about Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of a huge statue, magnificent in its design and awe-inspiring in its size. It had a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of a mixture of iron and clay. As the king watched, a strange stone arose and destroyed the massive statue which is where we pick up the passage. Daniel continued in his describing of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar:

Daniel 2:34-35, “You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

What an odd dream! What did it all mean? We’ll look at this in time. However notice the interpretation which Daniel gave as to the “Stone uncut by human hands.”

Daniel 2:44-45, “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king [Nebuchadnezzar] what will take place in the future; so the dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

As we’ll see when we get there, this “kingdom” is nothing less than the Kingdom of God which re-entered this world in Christ!

Do you understand the glorious and amazing message of Daniel here? It is written to these following people:

- To exiles in a foreign land called upon to sing the song of the Lord.
- To any and every nation, people, or power which might seek to abuse these exiles.
- To any and all peoples of the Lord thinking that they have been let down by God.

The Lord has a glorious message: He Reigns! His Kingdom is Invincible! This too is of the Lord! Today we see God's Kingdom in its humility; soon we will behold it in its majesty at which time we shall co-reign with God!

Talk about a life-changing, world-shattering revelation! No matter how dark may be our road, God is never off His Throne! As that is so, we must conclude that whatever providence confronts us today, from the flight of the sparrow to the reign and rule of a king, it is part of God's glorious, amazing plan! How God's people needed to hear this! How we need to hear this!

It is said that the twelfth century King, Afonso of Portugal, commented that if God had consulted him at creation about the placements and motions of the planets and stars that he would have ordered them better than they are. Talk about arrogance! This man looked at the heavens and said, "I could have done better than God in the creation and placement of the stars in space!" Can you imagine saying or even thinking such a thing? It is blasphemous!

Yet how much more so is it when God's very own people question the placement and motions NOT of the stars, BUT God's providence believing that if they were God, they could have done and would have better?

Christian! The great and glorious message of Daniel is that even in "the valley of the shadow of death," a good God sits on the throne of the Universe and is using all things in our lives to bring about His glory and our good! This we see in Daniel! And this we will see in time in our own lives if we but only trust Him! Sinclair Ferguson put it this way:

In the final analysis, the great issue may be one that surfaces in Daniel itself, in the questions: Do we have a God who knows and rules the future? Do we have a God who reveals His secrets to His people? Do we have a God who delivers men from burning furnaces? (Ferguson, 1988, p. 15)

Brothers and sisters! We have such a God! But the real question is: Will you embrace the words of Habakkuk, "Stubbornly cling to Him in trust"?

Bibliography

Ferguson, S. B. (1988). *The Preacher's Commentary – Volume 21, Daniel*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishig.

Longman, T. (1999). *The NIV Application Commentary: Daniel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

End Notes

¹ It is obvious that chapters 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11 are to some extent parallel; yet each advance the story in their own way. Progressive Parallelism is described by Ferguson as, “A style of presentation in which the author takes us from the beginning to the end of a sequence of events and then returns to the beginning to describe them again, this time in different terms or from another perspective.” (*Daniel*, vol. 21, p. 17)

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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