

UNRAVELING THE FUTURE

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

I. EAGLES RENDEZVOUS SESSIONS

- Session 1 Give in & Give up, or Stand up & Speak out? (1)
- Session 2 Your Kingdom or God's Kingdom? (2)
- Session 3 With God in Furnace or With King in Fear? (3-4)
- Session 4 Found Wanting or Found Waiting? (5-6)
- Session 5 The Monster Rules or The Master Reigns? (7-8)
- Session 6 Pray or Panic? (9-10)
- Session 7 End or Beginning? (11-12)

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Chapters	Themes
1	Exile and the questions it raises: Story
2	A vision of four empires
3	A trial of faithfulness and a marvelous deliverance
4	An omen interpreted and a king challenged and chastised
5	An omen interpreted and a king challenged and deposed
6	A trial of faithfulness and a marvelous deliverance
7	A vision of four empires
8	Aspects of this vision developed
9	Exile and the questions it raises: Vision
10-12	Aspects of this vision developed

Daniel provides us with a wealth of detailed information about the time of Israel's captivity in Babylon. With Ezekiel, he was the only prophet we know of who lived through this captivity. Daniel throws light on the person and power of Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's greatest king, whom he knew personally and intimately. Many biblical scholars believe Daniel to be the key for understanding much of biblical prophecy.

His book is often linked with Revelation in simultaneous study. Jesus gave prominence and endorsement to Daniel by quoting from the book. We read in Matthew 24:15-16: "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Daniel's visions spell out events that will mark the "end of time" although interpreting the details may not be as simple as some teachers of prophecy proposed. However, without Daniel's visions, we would not know much about the hierarchy of angelic powers, both good and evil, in the heavenly places. Daniel is the only prophet who mentions "the prince of Persia" and "the prince of Greece." Daniel's prayer of confession was pivotal to the end of the Babylonian captivity and the return of the remnant to Jerusalem.

Early during Daniel's life the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the place of God's revelation on earth ceased to exist. Both the book of Ezekiel and Daniel prove to us that God's revelation, ultimately, is not bound to any place on earth. God reveals Himself wherever He will and to whomever He will.

Who was Daniel?

Daniel means "God is my judge," or "judge of God." In Babylon, his Hebrew name was changed into Belteshazzar, meaning "prince of Bel," or "Bel protect the king." He was probably born in Jerusalem about 623 BC, during the reign of Josiah. He was among the first captives made by King Nebuchadnezzar during his first siege of Jerusalem in about 605 BC. This would make Daniel about 17-18 years of age at the time of his deportation. He remained in Babylon for the rest of his life. He was probably well in his eighties when the captivity ended in 539 BC by the Persian King Cyrus and was too old to be able to return to his native land. During the reign of the Babylonian kings, and also in the years of Darius' reign, Daniel rose to the highest office in the government of the empire, proving his outstanding abilities and unflinching integrity.

Daniel was one of God's choice servants and like the Apostle John, the object of God's preferential treatment. The archangel Gabriel addresses him with the words: "At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved" (Dan 9:23;10:11).

The language of Daniel from Dan 2:4 to the end of Dan 7 is Aramaic, the world empire's language, the subject here being about the world at large. The rest is Hebrew as the subject concerns the Jews and their ultimately restored theocratic kingdom. Daniel is often considered to be a forerunner of books called: "Apocalyptic Literature," which flourished between 200 BC and 200 AD. Most of the apocalyptic books were written by Jews in reaction to the oppression of their people by foreign powers. Often they wrote to explain why evil seemed to prosper while the righteous suffered.

Historical Background

Daniel's experience as a displaced person began with Nebuchadnezzar who mounted the throne around 604 BC and besieged Jerusalem even before his ascension, taking several hostages into captivity to Babylon. Daniel's presence in Babylon and his renown during his own lifetime is confirmed by his contemporary Ezekiel, who states: "Even if these three men-Noah, Daniel and

Job-were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD” (Ezek 14:14; 14:20; 28:3).

The world in which Daniel lived and worked was one of brute power and technological advance. Nebuchadnezzar was most celebrated for his buildings: the temple of Bel Merodach at Babylon, the fortifications of Babylon, and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon which were considered to be among the seven wonders of the ancient world.

SESSION 1: GIVE IN & GIVE UP, OR STAND UP & SPEAK OUT? DANIEL 1:1-21

OBSERVATION

Daniel 1:1-7

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

³Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service. ⁶Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

King Josiah of Judah was killed in the battle of Megiddo, when he tried to interfere in the war between Assyria and Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. His son, Jehoahaz, was made to succeed his father on the throne. After a reign only three months, Pharaoh Neco deposed Jehoahaz and made Eliakim king in his place, whose name he changed to Jehoiakim. Critics have hotly debated an alleged discrepancy between Daniel’s opening statement and some references in Jeremiah regarding the date of Nebuchadnezzar’s appearance at the gates of Jerusalem. Daniel states: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.” But in Jeremiah we read: “The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.” Another point of contention is the fact that Nebuchadnezzar is called “king” while in reality he did not become so until the year after the siege of Jerusalem. However, it is not uncommon to refer to a person as “king” in referring to events that happened prior to his coronation.

The difference between the Hebrew calendar and the Babylonian one may very well account for the difference in reference between Daniel and Jeremiah as Daniel was writing from Babylon and Jeremiah from Jerusalem.

Important for us is the fact that it was when Nebuchadnezzar first laid siege of Jerusalem, Daniel, together with some other youths of nobility, were taken to Babylon as captives. This marked the beginning of the seventy years of captivity.

Verse 3 explains the reason for the exile of Daniel and his friends. "Ashpenaz" is supposedly a Persian word that may mean "eunuch," indicating rather a position at the court than a personal name. Some commentators suppose that Daniel and his friends were emasculated at the time of their deportation. Nebuchadnezzar's motives for the selection of young princes and noblemen are not given. It could be that the king intended to eventually send them back to their homeland, after making sure that they would be his faithful puppets in administering his rule. The limitation of the search to the circle of princes and nobles would plead in favor of this supposition although physical beauty and talent among Jewish youths would not necessarily be limited to the upper echelon of society. One commentator suggests that the deportation of some of Judah's youths would give the king of Babylon a grip on their parents at home. In other words, the young men were taken as hostages so that their parents in their own land would be loyal to the Babylonian government to ensure that their children would be treated well.

Nothing in the text gives an indication of the boys' ages at the time of their being taken away. The Hebrew word *yeled* which is rendered "young men" literally means "something born," "a lad," or "boy." It is generally supposed that Daniel and his friends were teenagers at the time of their deportation.

The names of the four young men have a spiritual meaning in Hebrew. We saw already that Daniel's name means "God is my judge," or "judge of God." Hananiah means: "The Lord YHWH is gracious." The name Mishael stands for "Who is God?" or "Who is like God?" Azariah is a common name, meaning: "YHWH is Helper." Scholars have hotly debated the meaning of the Babylonian names given to the four youths by the man in charge of their education. They probably all refer to a Babylonian deity. Their qualifications were to be that they were without any physical defect, handsome, and intelligent.

Daniel 1:8-16

⁸But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. ⁹Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." ¹¹Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹²"Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Such moral courage did not come to them overnight; it grew over the years and it began with the making of some simple choices. “Daniel resolved not to defile himself.” From the context of this chapter, we understand that the three others eventually followed Daniel in this. The young men demonstrated with their decision that they recognized that the God they served was not the same as the gods of other nations. Their God was not a local deity, who was bound to Jerusalem and who had no jurisdiction outside His own territory. To them, God was the same abroad as at home. Their decision was not merely a choice of one type of culture for another. They did not merely follow a series of ordinances. They probably would not have risked their lives for that. Daniel and his friends considered the knowledge of God to be more important than their education, more important even than life itself.

The text does not specify King Nebuchadnezzar’s menu, so we do not know what kind of meat was served at the king’s table. It could be from unclean animals, such as pork, or certain kinds of fowl forbidden to Jews. Most of the meat, as well as the wine and vegetables, would have been first offered to idols. With Daniel it was a clear-cut choice to follow a vegetarian diet for the next three years as an expression of his loyalty to his God and also a reminder to all four of them that it was God who sustained them and even made them robust and healthy in spite of a vegetarian diet. In other words, their physical, mental and intellectual success was ultimately not due to Babylon but God! Daniel’s experience does not prove anything about the virtues of vegetarianism or teetotalism.

They deemed giving up the service of God to be “defilement.” They must have known that they were undefiled before God. Their decision not to defile themselves had been preceded by another decision by which faith in God had become a personal possession. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* quotes John Calvin, who commented on Daniel’s choice: “[He] simply determined ... by his very food perpetually to recall the remembrance of his country. He wished so to live in Chaldea as to consider himself an exile and a captive, sprung from the sacred family of Abraham.”

The way in which Daniel proceeded to adhere to his principles indicates an unusual amount of tact and sensitivity to the fate of others. Daniel’s decision to become a vegetarian could have endangered the life of the king’s servant who was in charge of his and his friends’ well being. Daniel’s decision to discuss the matter with his overseer saved the lives of all involved. Daniel must have made his request almost immediately upon arrival in Babylon. He and the others may have fasted for a few days, but they could not possibly have abstained from all food without drawing the attention of the official. In that short period of time, his behavior had been such that he had already won the respect of his guard. Daniel’s attitude caused the guard to be willing to listen to him and allow this ten-day experiment.

Daniel 1:17-21

¹⁷To 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. ¹⁸At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s

service. ²⁰In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. ²¹And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

The four youths distinguished themselves, obviously, in their ability to learn. They possessed, what may be called, a natural gift for learning languages, which was sharpened by their obedience to God. Fellowship with God does not always assure great intellectual achievements, but it hones the talents God bestows on the individual. Daniel's ability for the understanding of visions and the interpretation of dreams, however, was a supernatural endowment. The mention of Daniel's gifts is clearly meant as an introduction to the rest of this book, in which these gifts are clearly illustrated. God thus made one of the despised covenant-people eclipse the Chaldean (another name for Babylonian) sages in the very science on which they most prided themselves.

The Hebrew word rendered "knowledge" is *madda`*, which means "intelligence" or "consciousness." It is what God granted to Solomon. We read in 2 Chr 1:11: "God said to Solomon, 'Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honor, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and *knowledge* to govern my people over whom I have made you king...'" "Skill" is the rendering of the Hebrew word *sakal*, which means "to be circumspect," or "intelligent."

"Wisdom" is the rendering of the Hebrew word *chokmah*. We find it in 1 Kgs 4:29: "God gave Solomon *wisdom* and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore." Knowledge and understanding sums up the kind of wisdom expounded in the Book of Proverbs.

At the end of their three-year training period, the students were taken into the presence of King Nebuchadnezzar who took personal charge of their final oral examination. The fact that these young men outshone all the others suggests that there were others to whom they were compared. The comparison was also made with the established guild of magicians and enchanters. We may infer from the fact that the king took personal charge of the final exams as an indication of his own brilliant mind. Nebuchadnezzar was obviously more than a brute conqueror who only possessed military power. He may have been a very cruel potentate, but it takes more than physical strength and endurance to rule an empire and lead it to a pinnacle of glory.

Some scholars object to the statement in the last verse of this chapter that "Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus," because the last chapters of this book carry on till well into the reign of that monarch. What is obviously meant is that Daniel's service covered the whole period of Babylonian captivity. He outlasted all the four kings during this period - all his conquerors!

INTERPRETATION

Daniel 1:1-7 The Effect of the Exile

- a. Their _____ appeared to be weaker than _____.
- b. Their _____ was destroyed.
- c. Their _____ burned and its _____.
- d. Their _____ and _____ were not what they expected.
- e. Their _____ to conform to certain social and political demands.
- f. Their _____ put them in this situation.

Daniel 1: 8-16 Spiritual Resilience in a Hostile Environment

- a. There must be a _____.
- b. There must be a _____ of _____ for _____.
- c. There must be an exercise of _____ and _____.

Daniel 1: 9-21 God Honors Faithfulness

- a. It was God who _____.
- b. It was their _____ and _____ that made them distinctive.
- c. Success does not always bring _____.

APPLICATION

What is "Babylon" in your world?

1. To be effective for God in Babylon involved a serious attempt to _____ Babylon.
2. We don 't have to wait till our _____.
3. Faithfulness is expressed in and through our _____.
4. Knowing _____ that God is in _____ is the only way to stand up and speak out, rather than give in and give up in an alien and hostile culture and to outlast that culture.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is one area in your life that you will resolve to do something you truly believe will honor God?

2. Write down two actions that will be required if you are going to live out this resolve:

3. Share your area of resolve and your two actions with the group.

4. End with prayer for one another from the sharing.