

The Book of Daniel Lesson 1

Part A by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr

INTRODUCTION:

Few books of the Old Testament are as hotly contested in its date, authorship, and interpretation as the book of Daniel. On its own, the book does pose some unique characteristics: for example, it is written in two languages (Hebrew and Aramaic), and it is narrated in two voices (third person for the *court stories* of Daniel 1-6, and first person embedded in third person narration of the *visions* in Daniel 7-12).

But there are several other issues that face the interpreter. There are two basic interpretations of this book: one is labeled the "traditional" interpretation, which understands the book as a *sixth century B.C. composition written by the prophet Daniel*, and the other is labeled the "critical" or "mainline" interpretation, which sees Daniel largely as a *second century B.C. work*. The latter group say that the "traditionalists" fight a "rear-guard action" when they defend Daniel's historical reliability and argue for the earlier sixth century B.C. date. However, the voices of conservative scholars, such as E. J. Young, K. Kitchen, D. J. Wiseman and J. G. Baldwin, continue to present good evidence for the traditional view and a sixth century date.

In most of the centuries past, traditional Jewish and Christian scholars ascribed the book of Daniel as written by a Hebrew who was taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C., and who continued in the royal courts of Babylonian, Median and Persian Kings until at least 536 B.C. The

Neoplatonist Porphyry (A.D. 233-304), however, placed the book as having been written much later in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (who ruled 175-163 B.C.), claiming that the writer was reporting history as if the events mentioned were still in the future. Critical scholars began to take the same line of argumentation beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, that same line of specious (bad) reasoning is found among non-traditionalists, and even among some evangelicals. However, the historic details of the book, its chronological accuracy, and its prophecies, have been shown to be accurate in case after case and truly predictive and given in the sixth century B.C.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK:

The fact that the book is given to us in two languages, Hebrew (1:1- 2: 4a; 8:1-12:13), and Aramaic (2:4b- 7:28), points to the fact that Daniel addresses his own people in their native Hebrew tongue at the beginning and at the end of his book and the Gentile nations he addresses in the central section of his book in the Aramaic language, which was the *lingua franca* of the day. This, then, becomes an interpretive clue as to whom Daniel is primarily addressing: Gentiles in the Aramaic sections and the Jewish people in Hebrew. Moreover, the chiasmic¹ arrangement of the subjects treated in the Aramaic section from 2:4b to 7:28 is further evidence of this bifid structure (a,b,c, c',b',a') within this book.

- A. Four World Empires to be Replaced by the Kingdom of God – 2:4b-49
- B. Suffering via the Threat of the Fiery Furnace – 3:1-30
- C. Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – 4:1-47
- D. Daniel Interprets the Handwriting on the Wall – 5:1-31

E. Suffering the Threat of the Lion's Den – 6:1-28

F. Vision of four World Empires Replaced by the Kingdom of God – 7:1-28

THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES:

The book of Daniel is governed by a "Theology of History," in which the person and work of God the Father and the Son of Man remain in charge of all events and nations, even though the Israelite exiles have been dealt an intense shock in the sack of Jerusalem. But the Promise-Plan of God is still operative, despite the strangeness of a new land, customs, culture and religion. God's promise is still irrevocable (see later in Rom 11:29). God still owns the land of Israel, God's covenant with the patriarchs and David is still in force, God is God of gods, Lord of lords, and the decider of a nation's destiny.

There will be more to say, when we take up each of the chapters in Daniel, but it is time to get into the text itself.

"KNOWING WHERE AND WHEN TO 'DRAW THE LINE'"

Text: Daniel 1: 1-21

Focal Point: vs 8, "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine..."

Title: "Knowing Where and When to 'Draw the Line'"

Homiletical Keyword: Situations

Interrogative: When? (Do we face those **situations** in which we are called upon to take a stand?)

OUTLINE:

I. WHEN OTHERS JUST PLAIN GIVE UP (1:1-2)

A. IN TIMES OF WAR AND CONQUEST

B. IN TIMES OF EXILE AND QUESTIONING

II. WHEN PRESSURED TO COMPROMISE (1:3-8)

A. OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

B. OUR RESOLVE TO REMAIN TRUE

III. WHEN WE ARE PRESSURED TO CONFORM (1:9-16)

A. A DARE TO COMPARE

B. A RESULT TO ACKNOWLEDGE

IV. WHEN PRESSURED TO PRODUCE (1:17-21)

A. HUMAN WISDOM

B. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

CONCLUSIONS

I. WHEN OTHERS JUST PLAIN GIVE UP (1:1-2)

The book of Daniel opens in the first chapter (1:1-21), with the first of six narratives that come from life in the court of Babylon (1:1- 6:). It relates the story of Daniel and his three friends who were carried off into captivity from Judah to Nebuchadnezzar's court in Babylon in 605 B.C. The Judean king, King Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.), who replaced his father (the noted young and good King Josiah), had been installed as a "puppet king" by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (2 Kgs 23:30-34). But by the third year of Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to Jerusalem and had carried off many of the treasures in the Temple and palace. Thus it happened in 605, that Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan 1:6) as captives from Jerusalem to Babylon. This date of the third

year of Jehoiakim agrees with the accession year method of reckoning time in Babylon (computing the first full year of one's kingship beginning with the New Year's Day after the king had ascended to the throne). Some critical scholars argue that there is a chronological discrepancy in the Biblical record, because Jeremiah 25:1 declares that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is the "fourth year" of King Jehoiakim's reign and not the "third year" as Daniel 1:1 places it. However, if one realizes that Jeremiah's date is based on the non-accession year principle (beginning to number the king's years from day one of his reign), the difficulty disappears.²

Others worry about the historical veracity of this 605 B.C. incursion into Judah, since there is no separate account of a Babylonian invasion into the land of Judah on that date. But even in this case there is indirect evidence of a Babylonian campaign into Judah in 605 B.C., for the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his *Contra Apion*, 1:19, cites a Babylonian priest-historian, named Berossus, who claimed that Nebuchadnezzar was engaged in campaigns in Egypt, Syria and Phoenicia at the time when his father, Nabopolassar, died. And additional evidence is now supplied by a cuneiform tablet found in 1956 that Nebuchadnezzar had "conquered the whole area of the Hatti-country" shortly after his Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. The term "Hatti" embraced the whole of Syria and Palestine.³ Thus the report is correct.

A. In Times of War and Conquest

All too many tend to argue that in times of war and national distress, the normal way of life is forfeited. Ethical decisions are no longer made on the bases of right and wrong, for the feeling seems to take over that most everyone is going to die anyway; so why not live life up to the hilt and forget about divine standards and acting in responsible

ways as each was taught to live in the Torah.

The tragic events of the death of good King Josiah, killed at Megiddo by one of Pharaoh's soldiers in 609, followed by the king of Babylon's invasion of the country in 605 and again in 597, and finally the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., provided a feeling of despondency for those who despaired of life as they had known it, and might have called for a change in their faithfulness to God. How was God going to be able to work out his purpose in history and in the life of the nation Judah, now that tragedy had struck these three times? How could the glorious day of the new David, their coming Messiah, be effective now that the Temple was gone, the Davidic king would soon be gone, and all seemed to run counter to God's ultimate triumph over evil?

B. In Times of Exile and Questioning

The siege of Jerusalem in 605 B.C. would be the first of three major incursions into the land of Judah. Verses 1-2 do not claim that there was armed conflict at this time, but merely states that the country was "besieged," suggesting more of a threat of a battle. It appears that the Judeans thought it the better part of wisdom and valor at this time to hand over the valued articles of gold and silver in the Jerusalem temple and palace.

Later, when Nebuchadnezzar was in a position to check the disloyalty of his Judean vassal, Jehoiakim, he returned to Jerusalem, after being preoccupied with revolts in other parts of his empire. But by the time he reached Jerusalem, Jehoiakim had died and his son, Jehoiachin, had been made king in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:8). However, Nebuchadnezzar deposed Jehoiachin, and exiled him along with ten thousand Judeans, this time including the prophet Ezekiel (2 Kgs 24:10-17; Ezk 1:1-2) in 597 B.C..

The third time the Babylonians invaded Judah, Nebuchadnezzar's patience had been exhausted as he initiated a long siege of Jerusalem beginning in 588 B.C. Finally the city fell, Yahweh's Temple was razed and burnt to the ground and the Davidic kingship in Judah was ended for the time being (2 Kgs 24:18-25:21).

But notice that "the LORD delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand" (1:2). Therefore, instead of this being a capricious, or random, event in history, what happened here was not the work of the Babylonians, but was under the aegis of God's sovereign rule over all of history. The Hebrew verb rendered "delivered" is simply the verb "to give." This verb appears in each of the three scenes narrated in this chapter: vss 2, ["the LORD delivered [gave] Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand"] 9 ["God had caused the official to show [give] favor"], and 17 ["God gave knowledge and understanding"].

None of what had happened in this tragic turn of events was a surprise to Judah, for embedded in the Promise-Plan of God were the warnings of the curses that would come (just as surely as the promises) if they turned away from the Lord. The decisive factor for deliverance would be Israel's obedience and faithfulness to God's call on their lives.

–to be continued–

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NOTES

¹ "chiastic." A chiasmus is when grammatical constructions, or concepts, are repeated in reverse order in the same, or a modified, form; e.g. "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."

² Donald J. Wiseman, *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*. Oxford

Univ. Press, 1985. Pp. 16-18.

³ See Donald J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings*. London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1961, p.69.

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(Walter C. Kaiser Jr. is a former president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a prominent Biblical scholar with dozens of books, including *The Archaeological Study Bible* which he edited, and hundreds of articles on Old Testament subjects. Subsequent lessons in this new series specially made for Seed of Abraham Ministries, when posted, will be numbered and appear in the Torah Class archives, making easy access of these articles for future study of the entire book possible. Other of Dr. Kaiser's articles have already been posted on this website and may be found in the archives here.)