



“Prophetic Witnesses In Babylon” (Daniel 1-2)

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Intro: What Revelation is to the New Testament prophetically, Daniel is to the Old Testament. Jesus referred to Daniel as a prophet (Matt.24:15), and indeed he was. Many of the prophecies in Daniel are yet to be fulfilled (tribulation, antichrist, Jesus’ second coming). Though Daniel is a prophetic book, it also focuses on what true dedication to God means. As a teenager (13-17 yrs. old), Daniel was kidnapped along with select others from the royal family and deported to Babylon for the purpose of helping other deported Jews fit into their new Babylonian culture. Babylon’s intention was to basically brainwash these people and in time cause them to forget their Jewish heritage altogether. But Daniel makes this tremendous commitment to God and nothing changes it. He is never a victim of his circumstances. He never bails out no matter how tough it gets. He makes a commitment and he holds to that commitment. So it's a tremendous message of dedication to God, especially while living in a very pagan environment.

Secondly, Daniel is a book about God's care for Israel. Some people think that when Israel went into captivity, God turned His back on them. Not so. When Israel went into captivity, God made sure that they had a representative right in the middle of a Babylonian government – Daniel. Daniel was Israel's man in the White House. Even during the captivity, God provided a very special man in a very high place to care for their needs and to give them hope. We usually use the date 586 for the captivity, but eleven years before that (597) there was another group taken captive and even eight years before that (605) there was another group taken captive. So in the captivity there were three periods, 605, 597 and 586. Daniel went in the first captivity in 605. By the time the second group got there he had been there eight years. By the time the third group was there he had been there 19 years and was well established as a leader in the land who could come to the aid of his people. So God had set it all up in advance. Through Daniel, He gave tremendous prophecies of what it was going to be like in the future when their captivity was turned into glorious liberty.

Finally, Daniel is given to us to lay out the prophetic story of how the world as we know it is going to end. Prominent above every other theme in the book is God’s sovereign control over the affairs of all rulers and nations, and their final replacement with the True King. Daniel gives us the panorama of the history of the world to its consummation and in that very panorama lies the motivation to living for this very moment. If there was anything that solidified Daniel's

commitment, if there was anything that drove his roots deep, if there was anything that made him stay faithful through 70+ years of lifetime in a pagan society, I think it was the fact that the more revelations he had of the future, the greater impact it had on his present life. If we really believe that the prophecies of the Bible are true, it should change the way we live here and now.

THE TEXT

vv.1-2 II Kings 24:1ff; II Chron.36:5-7

v.3 II Kings 20:18

vv.4-7 Babylon's standards in choosing these young men. First was physical...no blemish and well-formed; then was mental...skillful in all wisdom, gifted in knowledge and understanding science; and third was social. They had to have the poise and the manner and the social graces to stand in a king's palace and not come off like a klutz. They said - Get us the smartest and the best-looking, and the most suave, young guys you can find and we're going to melt them down and remake them into Chaldeans. That was the whole plan. It was a plot to brainwash these young Jews. "How you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris?" Feed them the Chaldean food and seduce them by the appetites of Babylon. The Babylonians drank wine of all kinds, but the king's wine would be the very best wine, and the food would have been the best as well. And they were to get this good stuff for three whole years. Afterward they would enter the king's service. And they changed all their names to Chaldean names. Daniel = "Yaweh is my judge" to "Belteshazzar" = "Bel protect his life" (Bel was the chief god of Babylon); Hananiah = "Yaweh shows grace;" Shadrach = "Servant of aku" (moon-god); Mishael = "Who is equal to Yaweh?" Meshach = "Who is what Aku is?" Azariah = "Yaweh helps." Abednego "Servant of Nego" (god of wisdom). They changed their names to get them to forget their roots, their religious heritage, their families. They changed Joseph's name after he went to Egypt (Gen.41:45, Zaphenath-paneah). And remember a lady in the Bible by the name of Hadassah? That's the true name of Esther, the name Persia gave her.

v.8 What character, what commitment to the Lord. And this is our challenge. Babylon is a type of the world. False religion/paganism originated in ancient Babylon. Rev.17-18 are prophecies about the future destruction of Babylon.

vv.9-16 God honored their commitment.

vv.17-20 God now gives them wisdom that surpasses the wisdom of the world.

v.21 Daniel was a witness in a very pagan world for well over 70 years!

2:1-3 The magicians were basically fortune tellers. The astrologers are the stargazers, monthly prognosticators, charting the course of the stars and determining human destinies on the basis of how they arrange themselves. The sorcerers are the spiritualists. They are mediums, people who seek to contact the dead on behalf of the living.

2:4-7 They had in this day “dream manuals” that they used to interpret dreams, but Nebuchadnezzar is not buying the methods of his own culture. If these guys are the real deal, they should be able to discover his dream **and** interpret it.

2:8-11 Little do they know that there is a group of men among them whose God does live with them, and He is soon going to reveal Himself to all those great and small in Babylon!

2:12-16 God gives Daniel favor with Nebuchadnezzar by granting him time to discover the dream.

2:17-18 You better know all four of these young men are praying fervently! And God answers their prayers!

2:19-23

2:24-35 The dream

2:36-38 Herodotus the historian visited Babylon 90 years after the era of Nebuchadnezzar. After his visit, he wrote that never in his life on the Earth had he seen such an abundance and proliferation of gold as he saw in Babylon. He describes the chapels and the vessels and the accoutrements and the embellishments made of solid gold all over the Babylonian Empire.

2:39a The Medo-Persian Empire succeeded Babylon. "It's breast and arms," according to verse 32, "were of silver." And it implies a two-fold division. And the Medo-Persian Empire was just that, made up of the Medes and the Persians. Silver in Aramaic is the same as money (same word). The characteristic of this Medo-Persian Empire would be money or silver. And history bears this out. The Medo-Persian Empire developed a vast system of taxation. They required that their taxes be paid in silver and they literally filled their coffers with tons and tons of silver. The kings of the Medo-Persian Empire - there were many of them - just gobbled up silver money. Zirkstees was one of the kings of the Medo-Persian Empire, and he inherited an incredible silver fortune from his father Dorias. He also inherited more silver from other Persian kings and he used it to finance his massive war against the Greeks.

The Babylonian Empire made it to 538 B.C. and then came Cyrus the Great and with Cyrus the Great came the Medo-Persian Empire. That empire lasted some 200 years until 330 B.C.

2:39b This is Greece. Following the Medo-Persian Kingdom came the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. It's interesting that Greece descends to the thighs because the great Greek Empire primarily had two major facets. And here's a note of interest. Greek soldiers wore helmets of brass, breastplates of brass, and carried shields and swords made of brass. Brass became a sign and symbol of Greek conquests and the Greek empire.

2:40-43 The Greek Empire lasted on a little under 200 years. Somewhere in there at about 100 B.C. Rome became a power. Rome emerged out of nowhere to rule the world. And the Roman Empire went further than Alexander's conquests, and that's incredible!

Rome was two legs because it existed in a divided state - the Eastern Roman Empire and the Western Roman Empire. Rome was as strong as iron, the strongest empire the world has ever

known. The Roman legions were noted for their ability to crush all resistance with an iron heel. Babylon lasted 70 years, Medo-Persia lasted around 200. The Greek empire last around 200. The Roman Empire lasted longer than all of them put together.

As you go down this prophetic statue, it gets more diverse and more diverse and more diverse. And the more diverse government gets the more you have problems with it. And so the diversity of this final form is going to be its destruction. Now the final form of the Roman Empire has ten toes. We know from Daniel 7 and Rev.17 that this is a ten nation confederacy.

2:44-45 Fascinating, and a bit mysterious. This rock strikes the statue, and the statue represents kings and kingdoms of history. Verse 35 said that after the rock strikes the statue, it becomes a huge mountain and fills the whole earth. This would have been especially intriguing to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's chief god was a god called Bel-Merodach. Archaeology has discovered for us that Bel-Merodach had a very special name. His name was Shadu Rabu. Do you know what that means? It means the great mountain. Neb's prophetic dream has a personal message for him. There's only one Shadu Rabu and you haven't seen him yet. The title meant the all-powerful God. And when Daniel used this in the presence of Nebuchadnezzar, believe me, he understood it. Nebuchadnezzar had worked with stone. He was one of the greatest builders in ancient history. And he would have understood what it was to be a stone cut out without hands because he would have known the incredible effort necessary to cut out stones by hand. The stone in his dream just "happened" (supernatural stone). Then it says (I love this) in verse 35 that the wind came along and after all this image was smashed to pieces, the wind blew it away. Bel-Merodach got in a battle with Chiamat, the dragon of chaos. And the way that Bel-Merodach defeated Chiamat was to send a hurricane and blow the dragon away.

The rock: Isa. 28:16; I Cor.10:4

Note: Jesus, of course, did not come during the days of the Roman Empire of history, so what does this mean? It can only mean that in the days to come, a Revived Roman Empire will emerge, and during those days, Jesus will return. The most familiar view is the one that says the Antichrist will arise from 10 nations from the Western leg within the European Union. This view teaches that the coming kingdom of the Antichrist will arise from the western nations like Italy, Spain, France, England, Germany, Greece etc. There is another, fast-growing opinion of those who suspect the Antichrist's kingdom will come from an Eastern Coalition of nations, an Islamic Caliphate. Those who hold to this position claim that the Antichrist will come from the Eastern leg of the Revived Roman Empire represented by a combination of the Babylonian, Persian and Grecian Empires. These are essentially the Islamic nations of the Middle East and Africa, and include Syria, Egypt, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Turkey etc. Note Ezekiel 38:1-6ff. In the time of the New Testament, 60% of land that comprised the Roman Empire is today controlled by Muslim nations. In Islamic theology there are three great signs of the end of the world as we know it. The first is the coming of The Mahdi/12th Imman. He is the Savior of Islam, and when he comes he will lead a massive army in a holy war to slaughter all refuse to convert to Islam (pigs and dogs). The soldiers in this army carry black flags representing punishment. Iranian soldiers today carry black flags. He will initially make a peace treaty with Israel (and the West), but ultimately will slaughter all Jews and set up his rule on The Temple Mount in Jerusalem. He will bring blessing and wealth to the world, and the world will love him. By the way, he reigns for seven years, and when he comes, he comes on a white horse. Saddam Hussein had murals all over Bagdad of the Mahdi on a white horse. Now get this, the second sign in Islamic eschatology of the end is the return of Jesus. Islam believes in Jesus, but does not believe he died or rose

again, so he made no kind of atonement for man's sin. He went to heaven like Elijah. He is a prophet, but not God. He will come to aid The Mahdi, and will correct the Christians false belief about who he really is. He will travel to Mecca, worship Allah, establish Sharia law worldwide on behalf of the Mahdi. Finally, and this is the third sign of the end, Jesus will kill the Islamic antichrist. This false Christ of Islam comes riding on a mule, claiming to be Jesus the Son of God. He is blind in one eye, and is an infidel. When you study the Bible and compare Islam's beliefs about Jesus, the antichrist, and the false prophet who aids the antichrist, their Messiah fits the description of the antichrist of the Bible, their Jesus fits the description of the false prophet, and their antichrist fits most closely with the Jesus we believe in.

LESSONS

- Babylon attempted to cause Daniel and his friends, as well as all those who were deported, to forget their Jewish heritage, their commitment to the God of Israel, and begin to fit into the culture of Babylon, adopting its standards, and worshipping its gods. Babylon is a type of the world (See Rev.17:1-5). My love for the Lord, and my perspective on the prophetic future should cause me to purpose not to defile myself by developing the appetites of Babylon (I John 2:15-17). When God delivered Israel from Egypt (also a type of the world), he fed them manna in the wilderness, and that manna represented Christ. But they kept craving the food of Egypt, never developing a heavenly appetite. This is the challenge for us as Christians in the world we live in. Worldly appetites must be resisted, abstained from, and heavenly appetites developed and maintained. Joseph resisted sexual temptation in Egypt. Moses "regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward."
- Our commitment to abstain from the diet of Babylon will ultimately give us an opportunity to be a witness in our world. We know God's prophetic plan for the future, and it is our responsibility to share the wisdom he has given us regarding the future. Our message is one that should cause people to stop living for this world, because the kingdoms of this world are passing away. There is coming a kingdom that will last forever. That is the one we live for, and encourage others to live for.