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Daniel: Historical & Chronological Comments (III)

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3. The Captivity of the Sacred Vessels (Daniel 1:2-4)

The book of Judges tells us that toward the end of the **Sinaitic** period—the period of the judges—the people of Israel did evil in Yahweh's sight and turned to every god imaginable. Any god, it seems, was preferable to Yahweh: the **Baals**, the **Venuses**, the gods of Syria, the gods of **Sidon**, the gods of Moab, the gods of **Ammon**, and the gods of the Philistines—seven sets of gods in all (**Jud.** 10:6). Offended, Yahweh “sold” them into slavery to the Philistine and the **Ammonites**. **Jephthah** delivered part of Israel from Ammon after 18 years, but the bondage to **Philistia** lasted 40 (**Jud.** 10:7ff.; 13:1).

After 20 years of service to Philistia, the Israelites rebelled and camped against **Philistia** at Aphek. Eli was judge at the time, and also High Priest. The Ark of God was taken into battle and the battle was lost: Yahweh allowed Himself to be taken into captivity to **Philistia**. Eli's sons died. Eli died. Samuel became High Prophet, a second Moses. Samson began his work of defending southern Israel against **Philistia** (**Jud.** 14-16).

The Philistine took the Ark into the Temple of Dagon, their god, as a trophy. This signified Yahweh's defeat by Dagon, and Yahweh's reduction to the status of a vassal to Dagon. In the morning, however, Dagon was fallen prostrate before the Ark. So the Philistine put Dagon up again, but the next day they found Dagon broken into pieces before the Ark. Then plagues broke out in all five Philistine city-states, and eventually the Ark was returned with much spoil of gold. (See 1 Samuel 4-6.)

This series of events is an example of the Exodus Pattern in the Bible. As at the Exodus from Egypt, the gods of the oppressors are defeated and there is an exodus with much spoil. In this case, of course, it is Yahweh Himself who goes into bondage, as a substitute for His people, and who descends into hell, defeats hell, and

returns from the grave with much spoil.

The same thing happens at the exile, as recorded in Daniel. Daniel shows another instance of the same pattern, building on the events in 1 Samuel 4-6. We are told in Daniel 1:2 that the Master **Adonai** of Judah “gave **Jehoiakim** king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] 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 gods, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.” Just as the Ark, the center of the Tabernacle, had been taken captive at the end of the **Sinaitic** period, so the gold, the center of the Temple, is taken captive here at the end of the Kingdom period. (On the central importance of the gold, which symbolized Yahweh's **presence** in the Temple, see 1 Kings 6, which progresses as follows: the building of the stone shell of the Temple, Yahweh's promise to dwell in it, and then the introduction of golden glory into the stone shell of the Temple.)

The golden vessels of the Temple, taken to Babylon, make war on the Babylonians, as the Ark made war on Dagon and the Philistine. The climax of this war is found in Daniel 5, when **Belshazzar**, on his last night in this world, brought out the golden vessels, including the golden **lampstand**, and **exposed** himself to them (**Dan.** 5:3, 5). **Like** Dagon, he was killed. Prior to that time, the gold (Yahweh's presence) had subtly warred against Nebuchadnezzar, humbling and converting him.

Daniel 1:2 calls these the vessels not of “Yahweh's house” but of “God's house,” to emphasize that Yahweh is at this point in history going to be revealed as the universal God of all mankind in a new and more definitive way. The Sinaitic and Kingdom periods **focussed** on priesthood and kingship respectively, but in only one land. The Restoration period is a new period of priesthood, but in a worldwide context, leading to the new period of world kingship that comes with the ascension of Christ.

I have shown elsewhere that the vessels of the

Tabernacle and Temple signify God's **people** as servants of His court (James B. Jordan, *Exposition of Leviticus 11*, available for \$14.00 from Biblical Horizons, Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588). The golden vessels correspond to the royalty and nobility of Israel, as members of Yahweh's **court**. Thus, at the same time Nebuchadnezzar brought golden vessels to Babylon, he also brought "some of the sons of Israel, including some of the seed of the royal family and of the nobles" (**Dan. 1 :3**). These were "youths in whom was no defect," a requirement for priesthood (**Lev. 21: 16ff.**). Thus, these youths signified Yahweh's courtiers, His priests, analogous to the vessels of the Temple. Just as the golden vessels embodied God's presence, so did Daniel and his friends.

We must take careful notice of the **fundamental** pattern. Because of the sins of the people, God allows Himself to be taken captive and abused. He allows His faithful servants the privilege of going into captivity and **being** abused along with Him. Over the course of time, God and His servants defeat the gods and servants of the wicked, convert or destroy them, and emerge victorious. Thus, for instance, Daniel defeats the other servants of Babylon and of Persia.

Daniel 7-12 recapitulates this pattern on a larger scale. Daniel is shown that the history of the Restoration Era will be one in **which** God and His servants are repeatedly persecuted and **abused**. But, over the course of time, God and His servants will defeat the gods and servants of the wicked, converting or destroying them, and emerge victorious. Thus, the brief (70 year) captivity to Babylon is a type of a larger (70 weeks of **years**) captivity to three world empires. At the end of the first 70 years, the Son of Man, Joshua the High Priest, will receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days (see **Zechariah 3, 6**). At the end of the 70 weeks of years, the **greater** Son of Man, Jesus, will receive THE kingdom from the Ancient of Days.

4. The First Battle (Daniel 1)

The young nobles brought to Babylon included Daniel, **Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah. These** men are said to have been "good looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for standing in the king's house." For this evaluation to have been possible, the men must have been at least teenagers, and probably close to 20 (compare Numbers 1:3). Notice that Daniel is still living and active in the 3rd year of Cyrus, which is 71 years after the 1st year of Nebuchadnezzar.

The four men were given new Babylonian names, respectively **Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**. In part this was also a sign of the apparent victory of Babylon's gods over Yahweh and His servants. The meanings of these four Babylonian names are unknown; the last three are so obscure that some scholars think they are not the actual names given the three men, but deliberate corruptions of the names. Compare the

names **Ish-baal** and **Mephi-baal**, which are usually given in the Bible as **Ish-bosheth** and **Mephi-bosheth**. The word **bad**, originally a good word that just meant "husband and lord," has been changed to **bosheth**, "shame," apparently because of the later use of **bud** for pagan deities. In real life, these men were **called Ishbaal** and **Mephibaal**; only the later writer has changed their names for theological reasons. Something similar seems to have been done to **least** three, possibly **all** four, of these Babylonian names.

The meanings of their Hebrew names (approximately, and from what scholars can tell) are:

Dani-El - God has judged

Hanan-Yah - Yahweh has been gracious

Misha-El - Who is what God is?

Azar-Yah - Yahweh has helped

Note that two names incorporate El, God, and two incorporate Yah, Yahweh. The stage is set for battle.

During their three-year education, the men were to be served from the **king's** own table: choice food and wine. Daniel and his friends decided not to eat this food, and Daniel asked permission to be excused "that he might not defile himself." The supervisor permitted a test, that the four men might eat "seeds" (not "vegetables") and drink water for 10 days. The result was that after 10 **days** the four men were visibly healthier and more robust than any of the other students, and thus were allowed to continue on this diet.

What is going on here? There is no link to the dietary laws of Leviticus 11, which concern clean and unclean animals. Some have tried to say that the king's food would have been sacrificed to idols, and thus the men were avoiding an idolatrous meal; but against that suggestion are, first, the fact that the text says nothing about it, and second, that Paul later makes it clear that an idol is nothing and that eating previously sacrificed flesh is not a sin. Some have suggested that Daniel and his friends were acting as **Nazirites** in rejecting the wine, but that does not explain the rejection of the food. We must look elsewhere for an explanation.

I believe the clue is in the opposition of choice food to grains, and of wine to water. The term "seeds" seems to refer to any fruit or vegetable in an unprocessed condition. Joyce G. Baldwin rejects all **cultic** or ceremonial approaches and holds that Daniel was simply rejecting the covenant-forming character of table fellowship with the king and his kingdom (Baldwin, **Daniel; IVP** 1978). Essentially this is correct: they rejected the "bread" and wine of Babylon for other bread and "wine." That is, they heard the Babylonian "sermons," but rejected the Babylonian "sacraments," because participation in sacraments means full acceptance.

The four young men asked for "seals," on the evident assumption that these would not cause defilement. The language of Daniel 1 does speak of "defilement" (**Dan. 1 :8**), and the context for it is the expressed fact that Nebuchadnezzar had transported the Temple to Babylon

(Dan. 1:2). Moreover, Daniel did not always reject Gentile food, as Daniel 10:3 makes clear. Another piece of ceremonial language is found in verse 4, where the youths are said to have had no defect, a requirement of the priests of Israel (Lev. 21:21). Thus, the context militates against a “social covenant fellowship” view, and points in a more **sacral** direction. Perhaps Daniel and his friends saw themselves as priests of the Temple in some sense. That would account for the statement that they were without defect.

In such a context, what food was appropriate? The priests normally ate the sacrifices, which were unblemished as well as clean. No such food existed in this situation. Perhaps the logic of the situation is this: The only food that may be eaten in the Temple environments is sacrificial food, including processed grain in the form of cereal offerings. Since no such food was available in the “Temple” of Nebuchadnezzar’s palace, the only food the young men might eat was unprocessed vegetables. Since the priests were not allowed to drink wine in the Temple (Lev. 10), Daniel did not drink wine in the palace.

The young men were serving as priests, as learners, as apprentices; not as kings, rulers, advisors. Thus, they were faced with the question of which temple to serve: Yahweh’s temple or the Babylonian temple. They were willing to learn from the Babylonians, but they **fellowshipped only** in terms of Yahweh’s temple, where the appointed food was bread (grain offerings) and water (never wine).

There may be an additional factor at play in Daniel’s seemingly instinctual decision. When the Hebrews left Egypt, they left the leaven of Egypt behind and started with unleavened bread. They found new leaven in the kingdom of God, and fifty days later, at Pentecost, **offered** leavened loaves to Yahweh. Both “choice foods” and wine are “leavened” in the sense that they are mature products that **require** time to produce. Thus, they represent the already-developed Babylonian culture and civilization. By way of contrast, “seeds” and water are completely undeveloped. They are “unleavened.”

This may well be another aspect of what is going on here. I don’t believe Daniel and his friends ate only fresh vegetables for the whole 70 years they and the Temple vessels were in Babylon. Rather, it makes sense to me that once the first victory over Babylon had been gained, they would have “found new leaven” and begun to eat matured foods and wine, food and wine that had matured in a context of the kingdom of God. I would put that first victory during Nebuchadnezzar’s second year, when that king paid homage to Daniel and acknowledged the reality and validity of Yahweh (Dan. 2:46-47). At this point, Daniel became governor of Babylon, and had authority to do things his way. In a sense, Yahweh had **become** enthroned in the temple of Babylon. Thus, the food and wine prepared by him and under his authority would be **leavened** within a Godly context.

Daniel 1 ends the first battle by saying that at the end of the three-year course of education Nebuchadnezzar interviewed **all** the graduates, and found Daniel and his friends to be the wisest, so that they entered his service.

5. The Second Battle (Daniel 2)

Just as **Pharaoh** had nightmares that prepared him to receive the word of prisoner Joseph, so Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that prepared him to hear the words of captive Daniel. An interesting additional parallel is that Joseph was imprisoned under the “captain of the bodyguard” (**Potiphar**; Gen. 39-40), and Daniel interacted with the “captain of the bodyguard” (**Arioach**) to save the lives of the wise men and to get an audience with Nebuchadnezzar.

There is a chronological difficulty connected with Daniel 2. The event recorded took place in the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar. It is clear that Daniel has already **completed** his 3-year education, because **he** is already installed as one of the wise men (Dan. 2:13). The earliest **Daniel** could have begun his training is in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather late in that year. This gives us on fraction of a year, one whole year (**Neb. 1**), and another part of a year (**Neb. 2**). We must assume that Daniel, as he wrote this book (or whoever wrote it for him), was not insane and did not leave a plain **contradiction** in the text. Thus, we must resolve the problem by saying that the 3-year training **course** mentioned in Daniel 1:5 was not the kind of full 3-year course of study we **think** of today, but rather a **course** that occupied part of three years.

This information settles the question of when **Jehoiakim** and Daniel were brought to Babylon. They were brought during Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year, which **means** that Jerusalem was taken during Nebuchadnezzar’s Palestinian campaign soon **after** the battle of Carchemish.

Daniel 2 begins by telling us that Nebuchadnezzar had dreams that troubled him and left him sleepless. He called for his wise men. Verse 4 says that they “spoke to the king in Aramaic,” and from **this** point until the end of chapter 7, the text of Daniel is in **Aramaic**. Why?

One answer is that Daniel 2-7 record the course of world empire and God’s judgment upon it. Chapters 2 & 7 describe the course of empire, chapters 3 & 6 show an attack upon God’s people by servants of the empire and the victory of God’s servants over them, and at the center, chapters 4 & 5 show God’s judgments upon the rulers of the empire. Thus, this section of Daniel is a message to the world, and is written in a more worldly language.

I believe that there is a more specific reason. In the days of Isaiah, God had predicted that His people would hear the good news of the kingdom proclaimed in a strange language (Is. 28: 11). Paul tells us that the definitive fulfillment of this prediction came at Pentecost, when Jews from every nation heard the gospel not in Hebrew but in many languages (1 Cor. 14:21). As with most prophecies, however, this one receives a preliminary fulfillment at the

time of the restoration, after the exile. The good news that the Jews would be returned to Palestine and be allowed to build the Temple is found, in Aramaic, in Ezra 4:8-6:18. Similarly, the good news that Babylon would be judged and that the kingdom would eventually be given to the Son of Man is found, in Aramaic, in Daniel 2-7.

Nebuchadnezzar's wise men asked him to tell the dream so that they could interpret it. **Craftily**, Nebuchadnezzar informed them that they would have to tell him the dream, too. That way he would know that they were not merely guessing at an interpretation. If they, through their wisdom and magical powers, could tell the dream itself, then their interpretation could be taken as accurate also. The magicians objected that nobody had ever made such a demand before. Angrily **Nebuchadnezzar** ordered that **all** the magicians and wise men should be executed.

The soldiers went forth to kill all the wise men, including Daniel and his friends. This demonstrates that Daniel was already included among the wise men, but was not yet in the first rank of them, since he was not one of those initially called by Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel asked for time, prayed to God, and was shown by Him the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt.

Nebuchadnezzar had seen a great statue, whose head was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet of part iron and part **terra cotta** (fired and glazed clay). A stone cut without hands struck and destroyed the statue, and then grew to become a great mountain and filled the whole world.

Daniel then interpreted the dream. Nebuchadnezzar **and Babylon** were the head of gold. Then would follow a kingdom of silver (Persia), one of bronze (Greece), and then one of iron (Rome). The iron empire would shatter all the rest, but before the coming of the Kingdom of God there would be an admixture of terra cotta with the iron. The terra cotta would be **mixed** with iron, and thus would have the strength of iron (v. 41). Yet, the term cotta part would be brittle, and quickly broken (v. 42). The iron and terra cotta, in their attempted mixture, symbolized a marriage 'combining with the seed of men,' but a marriage that was doomed because iron cannot really mix with

clay (v. 43). The reference is to the Second Little Horn (Dan. 7), which though not Roman grew up in the circumstances of the Roman Empire, imitated Rome by attempting to blend with it and marry with it, and gathered to itself three of the ten Roman horns (thus **three** of the ten toes of the statue). I shall argue that this personage is Herod the Great.

The stone cut without hands is not a round stone, but refers to the altar of true worship, which according to Exodus **20:25** had to be made of uncut stones, stones which no human tool had touched. An altar is a miniature holy mountain, a place one ascends in order to meet with God. The altar of true worship would grow to become a great mountain. The tiny company of apostles would grow to a mighty church, and would displace the Roman empire.

This liturgical interpretation is strengthened by the fact that gold, silver, and bronze were the three metals used in the construction of the Tabernacle and Temple. From the perspective of the Bible, the essence of the world empires did not lie in their political might but in their liturgical presence. The conflict in Daniel 3, 4, 5, & 6 concerns worship, not politics. The implements of God's Temple and altar, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought to Babylon, were to make war on the gold-silver-bronze statue of world humanism.

Nebuchadnezzar responded to Daniel's words by **bowing** on his face before Daniel, and ordered that Daniel be given a tribute offering and that incense be burned before him. As this was **being** done, Nebuchadnezzar said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of lords, and a revealer of mysteries." Thus, the homage done to Daniel was actually **being** paid to Daniel's God. At this point Nebuchadnezzar was recognizing the God of Israel as a great God, but not yet as the only true God. The second battle in the war had been won. (Compare Nebuchadnezzar's homage to Daniel with 1 Samuel 5:3. After the Ark was put before Dagon in Dagon's temple, "when the **Ashdodites** arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the Ark of Yahweh.")

(chapter 5 will be concluded next issue)