

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel

Session 1 Content

Daniel within the larger story of scripture:

Author | Historical Context

God's judgment and sovereignty

Foreshadowing of Christ

Daniel and his friends taken into exile (1:1-7)

Daniel and his friends remain undefiled (1:8-16)

Daniel and his friends are promoted and preserved (1:17-21)

Author

Author Theory #1: Not Daniel	Author Theory #2: Daniel
<p>-Author belonged to the Hasidim, he was a member of a strictly orthodox Jewish sect which opposed Hellenizing influences on their faith and supported the Maccabean revolt.</p> <p>Proponents of this view also argue that the book was composed and/or edited (at least in part) by an unknown author (or authors) posing as the sixth century statesmen and prophet Daniel. They also argue that most of the prophetic chapters are merely "historical narratives," however the historical events do not match Daniel's prophetic visions.</p> <p>-Many of the themes of strict adherence to God's law in Chapters 1-6 are seen through the author's lense.</p>	<p>-The book records the life of Daniel and the visions he received from God during the time of exile in 605 (Daniel 1:5) until the third year of King Cyrus in 536 (Daniel 10:1).</p> <p>-The book deals with the rise and fall of empires and God's sovereignty over the ever-changing rulers and kingdoms of this world.</p> <p>-The book offered encouragement to Jewish people in exile who were under the oppressive rule of pagan kingdoms and under tremendous pressure to give up their Jewish identity.</p> <p>-The book offers a prophetic foreshadowing of Christ in chapter 7.</p>

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Historical Context

Contextual Approach #1 Hasidic Judaism, Maccabean Revolt, Antiochus Epiphanes	Contextual Approach #2 Babylonian Empire, Persian Empire, Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus
<p>Theologians that argue Daniel is not the author also place the context of this text in late first/early second century BCE during the persecution of the Jews caused by Antiochus Epiphanes. The persecution of Jews during this time period exacerbated feelings of dissent and caused the “unknown” author to portray extreme loyalty to God even while facing persecution or certain death through the book of Daniel. The author is assumed to belong to the Hasidim branch of Judaism, which is known for being an ultra-orthodox sect that demands complete loyalty to the Torah.</p>	<p>While the first contextual approach places the writing of Daniel in the second century BCE, other theologians argue that the book was written much earlier in the sixth century BCE by the prophet Daniel.</p>
<p>Antiochus brought collective trauma to the minds and lives of the Jews of his day by disrupting their religious observances, their ideals, and their cultic system. He recruited traitors to the Jewish cause, and he mercilessly persecuted those who were unwilling to assimilate to his cultural and religious norms.</p>	<p>The beginning of the book denotes the rise of the Babylonian empire after its conquest of the Assyrians, and later in the book it covers the conquest of the Babylonian empire by the Persians under the leadership of King Cyrus.</p>
<p>Antiochus marched and conquered Jewish territory, defiled the temple by erecting a pagan image on its altar, but he never destroyed the temple.</p>	<p>Babylonians recruited the best and brightest from conquered kingdoms to further strengthen Babylon. The recruitment of Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego is an example of this conquest tactic.</p>
<p>Problems with contextual approach #1: -This thesis does not account for the prophetic texts in Daniel 7-12. Daniel 11:40-45 does not conform to what is known about the end of Antiochus’ reign. This view argues that the author wrote prophetic texts as “wishful” thinking instead of divinely inspired revelation. Also, the visions that were allegedly written within living memory of the</p>	<p>Problem with contextual approach #2: -Opponents of this view critique the historical inaccuracies in the book of Daniel. For example, Nebuchadnezzar did not take Jerusalem in the third year of King Jehoiakim (6060 BCE). Instead, it was Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, who was borned away in captivity (based on 2 Kings 24). There are other errors in the history of the Persian empire, as it relates to the sequence of kings in Daniel 5:31 and 9:1.</p>

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events, and the various time periods listed in Daniel for the persecution of God's people and the restoration of the sanctuary services do not coincide with the three-year period mentioned in Maccabees for the desecration of the temple.

-What do we do about the foreshadowing of Christ in Daniel 7:13-14?

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of a man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

- Belonged to the royal family and/or nobility
- Young men without physical defect and handsome
- Showing aptitude and qualified to serve in the king's palace
- The king assigned them to learn Babylonian literature and language
- The king assigned them to receive a daily portion of food and wine from the king's table
- They were to be trained for three years and to enter the king's service after their training

Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon's Journey to Power

- Pre 612 - Assyria reigned as the most powerful kingdom of the Mesopotamian region
- 612 BC - Combined forces of Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians destroyed Nineveh, which was the oldest and most populated Assyrian city. Babylon was ruled by Nebuchadnezzar's dad, Nabopolassar, at this point in time.
- 609 BC - Soon after conquering the Assyrians, the Babylonian empire also defeated the Egyptians, which was the only other remaining empire.
- 606 BC - Nebuchadnezzar became king after Nabopolassar's death, then he took siege of Jerusalem, launching the 70 year exile period. Daniel and his 3 friends (Shadrach Meshach and

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Abednego) are taken captive to serve the king. Jerusalem is allowed to remain its own city, but only under Nebuchadnezzar's appointed rulers.

Babylonian Religion and Culture

The religions of the ancient Mesopotamian regions were polytheistic and deeply influenced by the occult. These cultures embraced beliefs in multiple gods, demons, astrology, and they followed practices that are strictly forbidden in scripture, like magic rituals, divination, idol worship, and even human sacrifice. As Babylon conquered other empires, they readily imposed their beliefs and practices on their subjects. Most conquered kingdoms adapted quickly to their captor's religion because they were already animistic, polytheistic, or pagan. However, with the Israelites, the Babylonians encountered a great deal of resistance due to their monotheistic belief system that adamantly rejected pagan and occult practices. These practices were strictly forbidden in scripture. We find examples of this type of resistance during the period of the exodus as well as during the period of exile through the stories about Daniel and his friends, and more in the books of the prophets. This excerpt from an article called, *Mesopotamian Magic in the First Millennium B.C.*, summarizes some of the ancient Mesopotamian religious practices:

“For people living in ancient Iraq and the imperial peripheries in Syria, Anatolia, and Iran during the first millennium B.C., magic was a part of everyday life. Far from being considered irrational, it was the guiding principle by which Mesopotamians understood various natural phenomena and their positive and negative consequences. For example, celestial omens could reveal the Assyrian king to be in imminent danger, or portend fortuitous circumstances in war. Magic could also be used to combat the negative actions of ghosts, demons, and human sorcerers, as well as protect against the curse...that resulted from unknowingly committing a sin, and thus losing the favor of one's personal god or goddess...”¹

Strong scriptural foundation exists for the case against Babylonian religions. These religions effectively and permanently turned the hearts of people in ancient Mesopotamian regions against the God of Israel, immersing them into idolatry and the occult. It is clear that the religion of the Babylonian empire was in direct opposition to the monotheistic Judaic tradition, and how this caused major concerns for Daniel, his friends, and the exiles.

Chapter 1 Exegesis

¹ Met Museum: *Mesopotamian Magic in the First Millennium B.C.*

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Discussion Question #1: What are some ways that Christians today face pressure to assimilate to the ways of this world? How can we remain faithful to God in the face of such pressure?

Daniel 1:1-7 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 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. Then 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—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. The 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. Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

Discussion Question #2 - What were the circumstances under which Daniel and his friends moved to Babylon? Why were they chosen for the king's service?

Discussion Question #3 - What are the literal meanings of the original names (Daniel, Hananiah, Michael, and Azariah)? And what were the literal meanings of their new, Babylonian names? Why would the Babylonian authorities have seen fit to rename these young men?

Daniel 1:8-16 But 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. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but 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." Daniel

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then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Discussion Question #4 - What was the test that Daniel proposed? How do you think the other men felt toward Daniel and his friends after their choice foods were taken away? What does that say to you about Daniel's faith?

Daniel 1:17-21 - To 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. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Discussion Question #5 - How were Daniel and his friends able to thrive as faithful believers in the one true God, even in a hostile, pagan culture? What core principles are needed to remain faithful while under pressure to assimilate?