
The Book of Daniel

Part 1

by: Ronald L. Dart

Of all of the prophets of the Old Testament, one stands out as the most fascinating. One has had a hold on the imaginations of men from time immemorial. One has more fulfilled prophecies than any of the rest. In New Testament prophecies this one is referred to more than any other.

The prophet's name is Daniel. Daniel was captured and taken as a hostage to Babylon some 600 years before Christ. He was a very young man at the time, possibly even a teenager. He was a contemporary of another prophet in the same captivity, his name was Ezekiel.

Daniel probably finished up his memoirs some 60 years later and I think it's good to approach his book as the memoirs of a prophet. I don't mean to suggest by that, that the book is anything but divinely inspired, but I think it is Daniel's story, his testimony, of the interactions he had with God, with angelic beings, with the Holy Spirit if you will, and with the leader of one of the greatest empires the world had ever seen. I believe Daniel's story and it is a fascinating story indeed.

In The Beginning

It began in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem, laid siege against it, and finally negotiated a settlement that involved carrying off a lot of people captive and a large part of the vessels of the house of God, made of precious metals, which he carried off to the land of Shinar to the house of his god. He brought all those vessels into the treasure house of his god.

Verse 3, "Now the king spoke to the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain children of Israel, of the king's seed of Israel and the princes of Israel. {4} He wanted children in whom there was no blemish," who were good looking, and who were also very smart. Or as he puts it "skillful in all wisdom and cunning in knowledge, who understands science, and such as had ability in it and to stand in the king's palace in whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

Nebuchadnezzar Realized that the Jews Were an Asset

This is really fascinating all by itself. Nebuchadnezzar was a wise man in his generation and he realized that human beings were an asset, unlike Hitler who was bent on destroying the Jews, Nebuchadnezzar was going to make good use of them. He wanted the young ones, he wanted them smart, he wanted them good-looking and he wanted them educated in all things Babylonian.

They were captives, but Nebuchadnezzar seems to have had every intent of finding intelligent and able young men and integrating them into the Babylonian system, but there's a religious and cultural problem, right from the start.

Verse 6, "There were among these that were selected, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: {7} And the Prince of the eunuchs gave names to them. He gave to Daniel the name of Belteshazzar, to Hananiah, Shadrach; and to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

Biblical Trivia Question

Now here's a great Biblical trivia question for you, what are the Hebrew names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? The Babylonian names are familiar and very famous among people because of the great Negro spiritual that uses them. But that should stump your friends very nicely, to know, first of all, what was Daniel's Babylonian name and what was Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's Hebrew names? Just a little time in memorization here and you'll be able to look very impressive to your friends.

Daniel Ate Kosher

"Well, Daniel made up his mind (Daniel 1:8) that he was not going to defile himself with the portion of the king's food nor with the wine that he drank. He requested of the prince of eunuchs, that he might not defile himself." What was going on? Well, Daniel ate kosher and he wanted to keep it that way. It wasn't that he was a vegetarian but there was no way to eat the king's food and stay kosher.

Now God (verse 9) had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. {10} "The prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I am afraid of the king, he has appointed your food and drink, he has said what you are to eat and drink. Why should he see your faces of worse liking than the children which are of your kind? You are going to make me endanger my head to the King."

Well Daniel thought that over {11} and "He said to Melzar," whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over them, {12} "Look, put us to the test, just 10 days, give us vegetables to eat and water to drink and {13} then you look at our faces and you decide, okay? {14} So he consented and said, "I will do it." {15} At the end of the 10 days their faces appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children who had eaten the portion of the Kings meat. {16} So Melzar took away their normal food and wine and gave them vegetables. {17} As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom and Daniel had understanding in visions and dreams."

So, what is coming with Daniel is not something entirely new. It isn't just something out of the blue that he can interpret visions and dreams. This had happened before he had the gift.

Appearing Before the King

"Now at the end of these days (Daniel 1:18) the king had said that he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar, {19} And the king talked with them and among them there was found no one like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore, they stood before the King. They entered into the court and the reason was because of their advice. {20} In all manners of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them, he found them 10 times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all of his realm."

Daniel continued in that position all the way to the first year of King Cyrus, which was a long time off into the future.

Now this is fascinating, how do you account for this astonishing favor and skill on the part of these men. A gift of God? Oh, no doubt about that! There was something very special and very spiritual about this, but I also suspect that there is something more.

Jews in Government Positions

It's a curious thing about the Jews, not just about these four young men, but about Jews in general, they have a knack for being close to the seats of power wherever they go. They seem to have a native wisdom about them, but I've never seen any indication that wisdom resides in any race's DNA, so why the Jews? Well, I have found a clue. You can take for example one small stanza of Psalms 119 and it begins in verse 97, the psalmist writes, "O how I love your law! it is my meditation all day." Now why is this man so in love with the law? Why does he spend so much time sitting around thinking about it? He puts it this way, {98} "You through your commandments have made me wiser than my enemies: for I always have enemies. {99} I have more understanding than all my teachers: Why? For your testimonies are my meditation. {100} I understand more than the ancients. Why? Because I keep your precepts. {101} I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep your word. {102} I have not departed from your judgments: for you have taught me. {103} How sweet are your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! {104} Through your precepts I get understanding therefore I hate every false way."

Now I am fully prepared to accept that obedience to God brings a supernatural gift of wisdom, but I'm also prepared to accept another side of this, perhaps the mechanism whereby that gift comes.

The Jewish people have a set of standards by which they are supposed to live, their spiritual and their social life is played according to a very specific set of rules, and the result of the continual study of these rules and adherence to these rules, gives them a framework in which they can live, in which they can judge the world and the people they deal with, in which they can evaluate business deals and human relationships. The result, it gives them an edge in life.

An Edge in Life

So why shouldn't the psalmist be excited about the book of the law when that book gave him an edge in life in everything he did.

So here are Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, young men who were educated in this system of law and who turn out to be wiser than their teachers and to understand more than the ancients. Now do I think that the study of that law and adherence to the principles of it can give you an edge in life, like Daniel? Why not? If I suggested a book to you that would give you an inside track in the stock market, you would take that in a heartbeat. Well this book, the Bible with its laws included, will give you an edge in life .

Nebuchadnezzar Dreamed a Dream

In the second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:1), he dreamed dreams, troubling dreams and they woke him up and he came out of his bedchamber {2} And called the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, and brought them together to show them his dreams. He lined them up," perhaps even in the middle of the night," and {3} He said to them, I have dreamed a dream and my spirit is troubled to know the dream. {4} Then the Chaldeans spoke to the King in Syriac." I gather that they were not native Babylonians because they did not speak the tongue.

"They said, O king, live forever, tell your servants the dream and we will show you the interpretation. {5} The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, Well, the thing is gone from me."

Now there's nothing particularly unusual about that, if you don't have something that nails a dream down shortly after you wake up, you probably will not be able to remember it after that.

So, King Nebuchadnezzar wants to know what the dream was. He says, "If you will not make known to me the dream with the interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces and I will turn your houses into a dunghill." Nebuchadnezzar was no fool.

I mean, I could interpret dreams the way they were going to do it. You tell me what you dreamed last night, and I will give you an interpretation and you will like the interpretation. All you need to be is a half-baked storyteller and you can do that easily. These guys were flimflam artists and they had a story for everything. That's how they got where they were. With these kind of people around Nebuchadnezzar, there would've been plenty of political action involved in the interpretation of any dream.

One wonders what is taking place here, maybe there was a little palace intrigue going on and perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was looking for an excuse to get rid of this particular class of astrologers. In any case he was not going to play the sucker for them.

Show Me The Dream

He said this in Daniel 2 and verse 6, "If you will show me the dream and the interpretation thereof you shall receive gifts and rewards and great honor, therefore show me the dream and the interpretation. {7} They said, Well, let the king tell his servants the dream and we will be glad to give you an interpretation. {8} The king answered, I know of a certainty, you're trying to buy time because you see this thing is gone from me, {9} But if you don't make known to me the dream, there is but one decree for you, you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me until the time be changed." Now what on earth that means, I'm not sure, but if we were looking at it more in a 21st-century political structure, "You're trying to buy time until the administration is changed, until I'm out of office and someone else comes in. You are not going to get the time"

"Tell me the dream and I will know when you show me the interpretation thereof it's true." Now I don't know what time was going to be changed, but it was clear enough there were some major political battles going on here and Nebuchadnezzar was minded getting rid of this entire clan of advisors. On the other hand, you have to remember Nebuchadnezzar also was not entirely right in the head.

Verse 10, "The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, 'There's not a man on the Earth that can show the King's matter, therefore there is no king, lord nor ruler, that ever asked such things of any magician or astrologer or Chaldean.'" In other words, you're not playing by the rules.

Wise Men to be Slain

"It's a rare thing that the king requires, and there's no one who can do that except the gods, who don't live with us" (Daniel 2:12). "Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon, every one of them, {13} So the decree went forth that the wise man should be slain, and they looked for Daniel and his fellows because they were in the overall group that were supposed to go. {14} So Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, who had the job. {15} He said, Why is the decree so hasty from the King, so Arioch laid it all out for Daniel. {16} Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that if he would give him some time, that he would show the king the interpretation. {17} Daniel went to his house, he made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions. {18} That they would also pray with him and desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning the secret, so Daniel and his fellows would not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."

Why Would God Give This Dream To A Pagan King?

Now a question arises at this point. Why would God give this dream to a pagan King to make one of the greatest and most sweeping prophecies you'll find in the entirety of the Bible?

It's a prophecy that spans the entire history of the world, from that time forward. It isn't clear, but there's a hint in Daniel's blessing after the dream is revealed as to why that was done.

In verse 19 it says, "The secret was then revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven, and {20} Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for

ever and ever for wisdom and might are his, and {21} He changes the times and the seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to them that know understanding. {22} He reveals the deep and secret things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with Him. {23} I thank you and praise you oh God. You have given me wisdom and might and have made known to me now what we desired of you for you have made known to us the King's matter."

Now there is this to consider, merely giving this vision to Daniel would've accomplished very little. Giving it to the King with a miraculous interpretation from Daniel gave it enormous credibility with Nebuchadnezzar and hence great credibility in general for this would have become widely known.

Daniel Reveals the Dream

So, Daniel (Daniel 2:24) went in to Arioch, whom the King had ordained to kill them all, and he said 'Don't destroy the wise men. Bring me before the king and I will show him the interpretation. {25} So Arioch brought Daniel before the King in haste and said, 'I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the King the interpretation.' {26} The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, 'Are you able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen as well as the interpretation? {27} Daniel answered and said, 'The secret which the King has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, and magicians, the soothsayers cannot show to the King, {28} But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he makes known to King Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed are these. {29} As for you, O King, your thoughts came into your mind up on your bed, what should come to pass hereafter.'" You wanted to know what is going to happen in the world after you're gone.

"He that reveals secrets makes known to you what shall come to pass, {30} But you need to know this, the secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that you might know the thoughts of your heart."

We are not dealing here with mere human insight, this is a miraculous revelation. Daniel not only has the interpretation of the dream that God revealed to him but what the dream means.

A Great Statue

"You, O King (Daniel 2:31), saw a great statue. This great image whose brightness was excellent stood before you and the form of it was awesome. {32} The image's head was of fine gold, his breast and arms were silver, his belly and thighs were brass, {33} His legs were iron, his feet were part of iron and part of clay."

Now this is fascinating and of course it's all symbolic. We have become very familiar in our modern world with the idea of icons. They are those little images all over your computer screen that if you click on them it does things. They symbolize things, instead of having words all over your screen, they just have a little tiny image that means something. Throughout Daniel, and in

fact throughout all the prophets, we wind up with icons that you can kind of click on the icon and it means something.

I've seen some very cheesy art of this statue. People try to paint pictures of it and there's nothing that you can really see merely by painting a picture that really enlightens you in the least. The symbolism is in the words.

A Stone Smote the Image

Daniel said in Daniel 2 and verse 34, "You watched, you kept watching until the stone that had been cut without hands which smote the image upon its feet, that were of iron and clay, and it broke them into pieces." So, we have a stone icon which we can put upon our computer screen and it smashes the feet of this image. {35} "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, the gold, broken to pieces and it became like the chaff of the summer threshing floor and the wind just carried the whole thing away, so there was no place found for any of it. The stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. {36} This is the dream and we will tell the interpretation of the dream."

Now by this time Nebuchadnezzar is all ears. Daniel has his undivided attention. A dream can get away from you. When somebody comes back and tells you precisely what it was, and you know that's what it was, and no one could ever have known except you, here is a man who is telling you what the dream was. Somehow, he knows.

Daniel Interprets the Dream

"You, O King (Daniel 2:37), are a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom and power and strength and glory. {38} And wherever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven have he given into your hand and has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold."

Up to this time in history most Kings merely ruled a city and controlled the lands around it. They were the king of the city state, but Nebuchadnezzar ruled an empire. He was a King over kings.

"After you (verse 39) there shall arise another kingdom, but it will be inferior to you and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth." Now we have gone from gold, down to silver, down to brass and we're still dealing with successive empires that rule over the whole earth. Two empires are to come. Now with 20/20 hindsight we know what those kingdoms were. They were Persia and Greece. Greece meaning Alexander the great in particular. These empires ruled the entire civilized world. It's true they probably didn't rule as far to the east as China or Japan but as far as the civilized world was concerned, they ruled it all.

Now the next empire following Alexander, we know historically was Rome. Rome in this vision is characterized as iron.

Now it goes on to say in verse 41, "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, they were part of potters clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided, but there shall be in it the strength of the iron

because you saw iron mixed with miry clay. {42} And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken. {43} And whereas you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they will mingle themselves with the seed of men but they will not cleave to one another, just like you can't really mix iron and clay."

The End Time

Now things are becoming a little more difficult, but there's a thread continuing. This statue, still all the way down to the end of its toes, still has the iron of Rome in it, but it lacks coherence at the end. Now historically, after the fall of the Roman Empire, it was revived in fits and starts over the ages, but it was always a European power.

Many don't realize that Hitler's Third Reich was an attempt at a new Roman Empire. Just do a little research on why the Reich was the third Reich, not the first, not the second. Do a little research on the symbolism of the whole structure of that terrible regime and you'll get a pretty good idea of why it was Roman.

But Europe to this day has great difficulty in maintaining any kind of cohesion, perhaps you can see why so many interpreters of the prophecy of Daniel, see Europe in the final stages of this image.

The Kingdom of God

And then there is this, "In the days of those kings (verse 44)" that can't get their act together, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom of His own, which shall never be destroyed. The kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." This takes us all the way to the Kingdom of God.

There is more, but it will have to wait until the next time.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you agree with Mr. Dart that Daniel is the most talked about prophet from the Bible?
2. Could you answer Mr. Dart's Biblical trivia question without looking the Hebrew names up in the Bible of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

3. Do you ever wonder why the Bible continues to use Daniel's Hebrew name rather than his Babylonian name?
4. Have you ever considered that God can give you a supernatural gift of wisdom by you keeping and loving God's law?
5. Why do you think God gave Nebuchadnezzar his dream?
6. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar wanted the wise people to tell him his dream?
7. Do you think the toes of the statue still represent a European power?
8. If you don't think Europe represents the toes of the statue, who do you think it represents?
9. How many different explanations have you heard in regards to the statue?
10. Did you learn anything new in Mr. Dart's study