**The Book of Daniel**

**Chapters 1-6**

**Daniel 1**

How did the exiles get to Babylon? Who is responsible? Who ultimately has power?

What might the refusal of the king’s rations mean?

What are some of the ways that Christians in the United States are expected to conform to the surrounding culture?

**Daniel 2**

In the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign = the year 600 b.c.e. (before chapter 1)

* It might be that Daniel is a “collection of stories that were never intended to be told together in a single setting.” NIB Vol. 7 pg 49

Dreams convey important messages, but what do those messages mean? “A.L. Oppenheim, in his classic study of dream interpretation in ancient Near Eastern thought, points out that dreams were believed to have evil powers over the dreamer, and one of the reasons why ancient peoples were so anxious to have the dreams interpreted was not only to know what they meant, but also to use that knowledge to conduct appropriate rituals to do away with the evil powers that produced the dream.” NIB Vol. 7 pg 50

Magicians, enchanters & sorcerers = prophets from other non-Babylonian cultures.

What do you think the dream means?

It is interesting that even though Daniel delivers “bad news” the king is impressed with and honors Daniel.

Who does Daniel credit for his abilities?

**Daniel 3**

Pay attention to the dimensions of the statue. A cubit is about 1.5 feet. What is problematic with this statue?

“Greek versions insert a date for this event as the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar – in other words, the year of his conquest of Jerusalem. Thus the statue went up in the year the Temple came down – false worship as opposed to true worship.” Pg. 62

“Whether Nebuchadnezzar ever erected such a statue is totally beside the point. The point was that he could – he could amass that much gold; he could assemble the leaders; he could demand obedience and threaten horrible punishment – and this is the plausibility the stories of Daniel are based on.” Pg62

Verse 15: Who is the god… = who is greater than me? Nebuchadnezzar will soon find out…

Verse 24: Literally the Aramaic says “son of God” – Who do you think might be in the fire with the 3 men?

Who is mighty – who is powerful – who is in control? Who thinks he is?

**Daniel 4**

Summary: (from enterthebible.org)

Nebuchadnezzar learns that the only enduring thing in this world is the reign of God; his power was derived from God, but he became awed by the pomp of power and mistook it as his own. The exiles could take comfort in the fact that God checks the pride of the powerful even when that power is not violently directed against the people of God. There is no need to be awed by the pomp of power; only God's power will be enduring.

Interesting?

It may be that Nebuchadnezzar has been confused with a different Babylonian king, Nabonidus. Other, outside the Bible, traditions indicate that Nabonidus did leave Babylon for several years. Much of that time was spent on a desert oasis called Tema. Nabonidus was heavily criticized by Babylonian culture for his absence. Some of those criticisms are mirrored in this text toward Nebuchadnezzar.

**Daniel 5**

Nebuchadnezzar is out, his son Belshazzar is the new King.

**Daniel 6**

**Daniel 4:1-37 – The Proud Will Be Humbled**

**SUMMARY**

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**ANALYSIS**

[In the comments below the name Nebuchadnezzar will be used as in the biblical text, but there is much evidence to suggest that the tradition has confused Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus. Nabonidus did withdraw from Babylon for several years to the desert oasis of Tema.]

Nebuchadnezzar learns that God's power is greater than the power of any human being, kings included. From the dream in Daniel 2 and the events of Daniel 3, the king should clearly have known of God's power. Nebuchadnezzar's opening testimony to the wonder of the Most High God comes close, with one key exception: he thought all of God's power existed to secure his own ease (4:1-4).

The king did not always use his power faithfully. While all people, beasts, and birds could benefit from his rule (compare 2:38 with 4:12), he often threatened, and even caused, death (2:13 and 3:6, 22). He used his power as if he were accountable to no one. His power was extensive, but he needed to learn that it was dependent on the giver-God-who can readily take power away. The king remains clueless even after receiving the dream. Daniel sensed the profound change that would need to take place in the king. Any change as profound as this would be unsettling to the empire, even though it was necessary. If the king had acknowledged that his power was given by God, he would have shown it by using it on behalf of the oppressed (4:27). The surest sign of the misuse of power is the lack of redress for wrongs done to the least powerful in a society. The tranquility or peace that the king longs for (or imagines for himself) must include justice for the weak. If not, its longevity will be short-lived as he found out.

The king's attitude toward God seems to have changed by 4:36, but one cannot be sure how much. In this verse, the first-person pronoun is frequent ("my" majesty and "my" kingdom). On the other hand, he does acknowledge God's power more here than he did earlier. He does say, "I was re-established" (4:36), rather than "I have built" (4:30). Whatever one decides about the depth or sincerity of Nebuchadnezzar's change, it will become clear that the next king, Belshazzar, did not take to heart the message given Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 4 sets up Daniel 5.

**Daniel 5:1-31 – The Writing on the Wall**

**SUMMARY**

Belshazzar replaces Nebuchadnezzar in the storyline, but there is no improvement in leadership. Belshazzar's story repeats the self-satisfied pride of his predecessor and extends it to a blasphemous use of the temple vessels. Once again a disturbing vision-four letters on a wall-must be interpreted by Daniel. They signal the end of the Babylonian era and point to Belshazzar's death.

**ANALYSIS**

Daniel 5 repeats and extends many of the themes of the prior chapters. Daniel 4, for example, explored the breaking of a prideful power that did not know its source. Daniel 5 addresses a pride that not only ignores the proper use of power, but also challenges its divine source. Belshazzar's party probably started simply as an occasion for him to be a "big shot"-both to show off and to consolidate support for himself by hosting his followers. Belshazzar's self-centered party soon grew blasphemous as the guests drank from vessels of the temple in Jerusalem and worshiped other gods (5:3-4). Such blasphemy indicates that the king had let the party go to his head.

This story is told from a Judean point of view. It doesn't tell us why vessels from the temple in Jerusalem were used and not the vessels from some other conquered temple. The writer is simply interested in exploring the rebellious challenge to the God of Israel. God had given Nebuchadnezzar the victory over Jerusalem (1:1-2) which had culminated in the plundering of the temple vessels. The victory itself belonged to God, but King Belshazzar saw it simply as another sign of Babylonian prestige. What Babylonians worshiped was merely gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone-objects of creation-but not the God of creation.

Belshazzar's vision shattered the power taken for granted in the Babylonian empire. The king remained pale (5:6, 9), because no one could interpret his dream. When his lords saw that their king was scared, they could only be scared as well (5:9). They were dependent on him. Their world had not been enlarged enough to include the Lord of heaven as a major factor.

Earlier, Nebuchadnezzar's stubborn pride led to a quarrel with his advisors, whom he finally threatened with death (2:2-11). Now, in Daniel 5, we meet a king who was too proud to have learned from his father. Admitting the need to learn anything is an admission that one is not self-sufficient; it is not surprising then that Belshazzar does not acknowledge God. The king is forced to accept advice from people not included in the party: first the queen (5:10) and then Daniel (5:12-13). When the king called for Daniel, it was clear that he knew his gods of gold, silver, and the like were of no use (5:13-17).

Daniel would not accept honorific rewards from the king for doing his duty (5:17). His way of life was the opposite of the principles on which the king had based his conduct. When at the end of the chapter the king commands the reception of his gifts, there is a quick reversal. Daniel, the servant, is honored, while the one who judged the world and his conduct on the basis of prestige is killed.

Because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar was condemned to seven years of subhuman life (4:32). Belshazzar, in contrast, was killed (5:30). Belshazzar's pride had led to blasphemy, which was an act of defiance beyond that of Nebuchadnezzar's. Belshazzar challenged God directly by making light of the vessels from the temple. The temple vessels were just as powerless in themselves as the Babylonian gods of gold, silver, and bronze. But through their use in Israel's worship life, they had come to be symbols of the presence of God. To make light of them was to make light of the events of salvation they were used to commemorate.

**Daniel 6:1-28 – May Your God Rescue You!**

**SUMMARY**

The story of Daniel and the lions' den is similar to Daniel 3 in which a fiery furnace was used as a threat. Darius's officials plotted against Daniel (6:4-5). The king, no doubt out of vanity, fell in line with the plot and became entrapped in his own system of supposedly permanent laws (6:6-9, 12-14). Daniel is faithful to his God, and the king recognizes the capacity of Daniel's God to rescue and save. Those who sought to kill Daniel are themselves killed.

**ANALYSIS**

The new king needed to organize his government around himself. He came in as an outsider; he was, according to the text, a Mede, not a Chaldean. Old loyalties may have had to be broken up in order for the king to have confidence that his will would be carried out. What specifically motivated the officials plot against Daniel is not stated, but the general context of administrative turmoil suggests that jealousy for Daniel's distinction (6:3) was among the motivations.

The officials sought to find fault with Daniel's performance record, but apparently it was so good that it could not be twisted into anything incriminating (6:4). Thus, the officials turned to his religious faithfulness to attack him at his strength. They urged the king to allow prayer to no one but himself for thirty days (6:7), knowing Daniel would not be able to live with this.

Daniel was not one to use God simply to bail himself out of trouble. No matter what his condition, he knew that, as a creature of God, he owed God honor and praise. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had acknowledged earlier (3:17-18), Daniel knew that allegiance to God was necessary, whether he lived or died. It was because of this that his prayer for help did not presume God's help in any way. The prayer was uttered by one who knew his creaturely place.

The king stated, "May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!" (6:16). The exclamation could be both a genuine wish and an expression of his helplessness. He undoubtedly had been proud of the strong principles of the legal system he represented. Now, however, he was trapped in it. The author and enforcer of the law had become its victim as well.

When Darius rushes out in the morning, Daniel greets the king with a standard phrase of respect: "O king, live forever!" (6:21). This was a rather remarkable statement, considering the terror to which Daniel had just been subjected. The simplicity of this honest expression of loyalty mocks the manipulative character of the officials who had entrapped both Daniel and Darius.

The officials who plotted against Daniel had used the power of the throne for their own ends. They could no longer be trusted to serve the monarch. As a result, they were killed. Recall the power that Daniel said God had granted Nebuchadnezzar (5:19). Violent power has characterized each of the kings. In giving Nebuchadnezzar and his followers their authority, God's intentions become enmeshed with the intentions of human kings.

The fear and trembling that Darius commands people to have for the "God of Daniel" (6:26) contains no statement of exclusivity. As with Nebuchadnezzar's previous decrees (2:47; 3:29; 4:34-35), Darius acknowledges the dominion of the true God, but does not prohibit the worship of other gods. It is important to remember that the first readers of these stories were Jewish. Their God was being reaffirmed and their faith encouraged. The theoretical question of existence of other gods was not a matter of central concern; rather, the question was whether or not their God was both in control and faithful.

The tight, ironic references to dominion at the end of the chapter should not be missed. Darius issues a decree for all of his royal "dominion" (6:26) in which he acknowledges the everlasting "dominion" of God. This is followed by the note that Daniel served into the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Darius's dominion did not even extend beyond the lifetime of Daniel. His decree in 6:26-27 that God's dominion had no end proved to be true in a manner he probably did not expect.