

Daniel - A Christian living in a secular World

The book of Daniel, named after & written by Daniel in the 6th century b.c., records the events of his life from the time of his exile in 605 (1:1) until the third year of King Cyrus, 536 (10:1).

When asked about the book of Daniel, like the book of Revelation, many people either love it or loathe it. Except for the well known parts like 'the flaming furnace, the lion's den, the dreams and visions, ...the imagery and prophetic/apocalyptic messages often prove too much for many people.

My appeal to us all is to take a deep breath and pray that, through His Holy Spirit, God will guide us in our study of the book of Daniel.

The core message of Daniel is, in spite of appearances, God is in control! God being in control was important before, during and after the time of Daniel (6th century BC), and is extremely important for our own time, and in the time to come. This is something we need to regularly return to, especially when certain images and detail could frustrate our understanding of the text.

Perhaps we today consider ourselves sophisticated enough to know that human kingdoms are not in control. But while hatred, abuse of power and authority, persecution, poverty, famine, disease, and the love and pursuit of all things worldly, ...still dominate our horizons, many people may doubt that God is in control. Some openly argue that God is not in control, and a superficial reading of Daniel may leave people with that impression. Being confident to counter this thought is one reason why it's so important for us to spend time studying the book of Daniel.

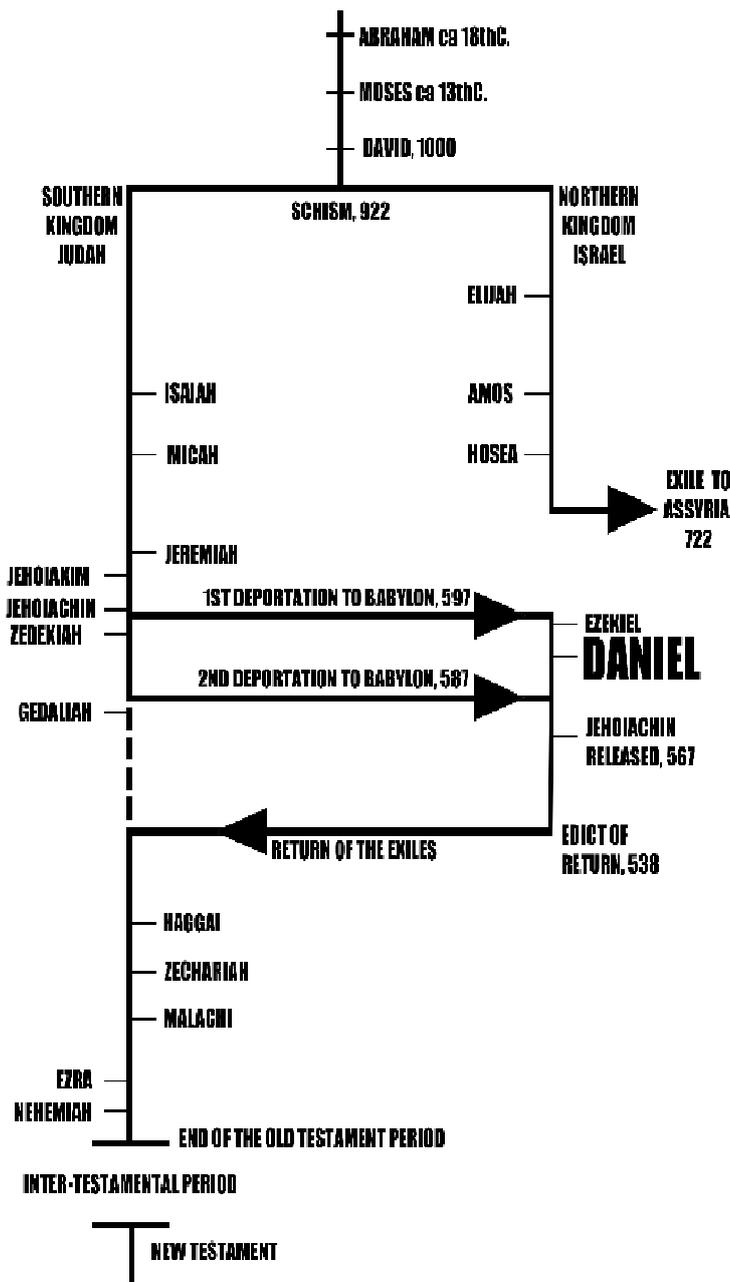
As I begin a serious study of the book of Daniel, it has helped me to remember the person and life of Joseph. Another time, another experience, another exile, another opportunity for doubters to ponder on whether God was truly in control, ...another person of God's choosing who would through a growing close relationship with a king be used by God to help God's people.

I believe the book of Daniel will remind us over and over again that in spite of appearances, ...God is in control! This core message is something we Christians need to be convinced of as we live out our lives in a fallen, hurting world. The same world that Adam was exiled into, a world where we find ourselves in exile also (although no longer in spiritual exile), until Christ returns and delivers us from this exile.

We do well to remember the words Jesus spoke to the church in Philadelphia,

"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name. 13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev 3:11-13)

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Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was a young man of noble blood who was exiled from Judah during the time of King Jehoiakim (609–597 b.c.) and lived thereafter at the Babylonian court. After the fall of the Babylonian Empire, he served the Medo-Persian

Kings of Babylon/Mede & Persia (History taken from the ‘Babylonian Chronicles’ in the British Museum, cf J. Baldwin’s commentary on Daniel. Also from the Int. Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Not all the below kings get a mention in Daniel.)

627BC Nabopolassar becomes king.

605BC Nebuchadnezzar conquers Egyptian territory including Palestine & Jerusalem, takes hostages including Daniel to Babylon.

604BC Nabopolassar dies & his son Nebuchadnezzar becomes king, Nebuchadnezzar’s 1st dream (Dan 2).

597BC Nebuchadnezzar II returns to Jerusalem & 10,000 are taken to Babylon including Ezekiel.

588BC Jerusalem is besieged. 587BC King sets up statue for worship (Dan 3). S.M. & A in furnace. 586BC Jerusalem finally falls.

567BC (approx) Nebuchadnezzar’s 2nd dream (Dan 4).

562/1BC Nebuchadnezzar dies & his son Evil-Merodach becomes king.

560BC Evil-Merodach murdered by Neriglissar (brother-in-law).

556BC Neriglissar dies & his son Labashi-Marduk reigns for 2 months, before being murdered by Nabonidus, who becomes king, and welcomes his son Belshazzar as co-regent.

539BC Belshazzar is slain, & Darius (a Mede, son of Xerxes cf Dan 9) becomes king. (The Medes had previously defeated the Assyrian empire).

Cyrus becomes king of Persia, and claims Babylon, and frees exiles to Jerusalem.

(N.B. While not all, some scholars argue Darius & Cyrus are one of the same persons cf Dan 6:28)

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Study 1 Daniel 1 Who's calling the shots?

Read 2 Kings 24 - 25

take note of the relevant details in the diagram on page 3.

Why did all this happen to Judah?

What happens to the temple?

What is significant about this? (see Deuteronomy 12:1-14)

Read Daniel 1:1-7

Who is in charge and calling the shots with God's people?

What could you be forgiven for concluding?

From your own life experiences have you ever thought something similar, & if so, how have you dealt with it?

Read Daniel 1:8-15

Why did Daniel think the royal food and wine would defile him?

How does God honour Daniel's decision?

Who is in charge and calling the shots with God's people?

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Think it through

How might this effected the chief official's beliefs?

Take note of who he fears and why.

Take note of who he comes to trust and why.

Contrast the rule of Nebuchadnezzar and that of God.

Read Daniel 1:17-21

Why did Nebuchadnezzar find Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom?

Why do you think God did this?

Who is King Cyrus, and why is mention of him here significant? (see Isaiah 44:24-45:1 and Ezra 1:1-8)

Who is in charge and calling the shots with God's people?

Think it through...

Who is King Cyrus a shadow of? (see Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

As those hoping in the true anointed Messiah, how might we be like Daniel and his fellow Jews? (see 1 Peter 2:9-12)

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What might this look like:

1. as you talk about people you struggle with at church with your non-Christian friends, family, work colleagues or fellow students?
2. as you get into a conversation on gay marriage?
3. as you're invited to the pub for a few drinks?
4. as the women at your mother's group start gossiping about someone?
5. as you get into a conversation about how our world condones pre-marital sexual behaviour and/or sexual affairs?
6. as you contemplate using work time and work resources for inappropriate personal gain?
7. as you contemplate the many extra-curricular opportunities for your kids?
8. as you think about holidays and gospel ministry activities?

A prayer of John Calvin in his commentary on Daniel:

“Grant, Almighty God, since you set before us so clear a mirror of your wonderful providence and of your judgements on your ancient people, that we may also be surely persuaded of our being under your hand and protection. Grant, that relying on you, we may hope for your guardianship, whatever may happen, since you never lose sight of our safety, so that we may turn to you with a secure and peaceful mind.

May we so fearlessly wait for all dangers amidst all the changes of this world, that we may stand upon the foundation of your word which can never fail.

And leaning on your promises, may we rest in Christ, to whom you have committed us, and whom you have made the shepherd of all your flock.

Grant that he may be so careful of us as to lead us through this course of warfare, however troublesome and turbulent it may prove, until we arrive at that heavenly rest which he has purchased for us by his own blood. Amen”