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THE TRAINING OF DANIEL IN BABYLON

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GOD'S RULE IN BRINGING DANIEL TO BABYLON, DANIEL 1

Daniel Is Brought to Babylon, 1:1–5

1:1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. This crucial event in the history of Israel is dated by Jeremiah in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 46:2; also 25:1). Many critics have looked upon this as a hopeless contradiction between the two books, thus discrediting Daniel as a dependable historical document.

Daniel, like many books in the library of Scripture, gives prominence to time relationships (relative chronology). To the student of God's Word this should bring encouragement. The Bible describes events that really happened. It is not an existential source book but rather God's inerrant record of His works in heaven and on earth. When our Lord told His disciples to "understand" the book of Daniel (Matt. 24:15), He must have included the chronological references of the book, since its chronology is the backbone of its historical (and thus theological) credibility. To study biblical chronology can thus be as "spiritual" an activity

as to study its theology, for everything God put into His written Word sheds light on its total message to mankind.

Now with regard to this particular objection of the critics, it can be demonstrated that the apparent chronological discrepancy in the opening verse of the book points to two different calendar systems. Daniel used *Tishri* (October) reckoning for the beginning of Jehoiakim's official year, whereas Jeremiah used *Nisan* (April) reckoning. The reason this fact resolves the apparent discrepancy is that according to Jeremiah's Nisan reckoning, Jehoiakim's fourth official year began in the spring of 605 BC, whereas Daniel's Tishri reckoning would place it in the fall of that year. Since all events occurring between spring and fall would automatically be one year off when these two distinct systems of chronology were used, the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar (which occurred in the summer of 605) would still be in the third year according to Daniel's system but in the fourth year according to Jeremiah's system.

But how can we be sure that these two methods of reckoning the reigns of Judean kings were actually being used at that time? According to Edwin R. Thiele, the Davidic kings of Judah started the custom of counting the fall as the appropriate time for kings to begin their reigns *officially*, namely, the first day of the seventh month (Tishri).¹ The harvest time was now ended, and the agricultural and secular life of the nation began anew. Even to this day, the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) comes in the fall, the first day of Tishri.

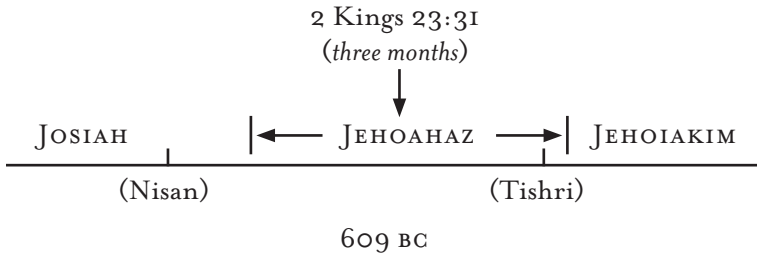
Proof that the Tishri system was used in Judah may be seen in the fact that a special Passover was held in the eighteenth year of Josiah (2 Kings 23:23); but several months *before* this celebration (held during Nisan, the first month of the year by Babylonian reckoning), events were already being dated in his eighteenth year (22:3). Compare also Nehemiah 1:1 with 2:1. The *religious*

calendar, of course, began in the spring, the first of Nisan, in commemoration of the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

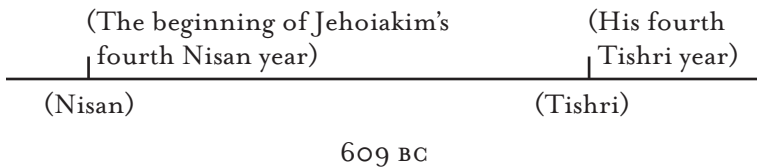
Now the kings of Assyria and Babylon used Nisan (April) instead of Tishri (October) as the appropriate time for the official commencement of the reigns of their kings. It is quite significant that Jeremiah, whose main task under God was to prepare apostate Judeans for exile to Babylon, would use the Babylonian system (Nisan) as a warning that this foreign empire was about to take over Judea. On the other hand, Daniel would have found it appropriate to use his native Tishri system in order to encourage his fellow Jews, now in exile in Babylonia, to think in terms of the homeland to which they would eventually return (even as he faced Jerusalem thrice daily in prayer).

It is also necessary to observe that the time that elapsed between the king's accession to the throne and the first of Nisan (in Babylon) or the first of Tishri (in Judea) was called his "accession year" and did not count numerically.

Applying these principles to Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, we must note, first of all, that he did not take the throne until shortly after the first of Tishri, which, in the year 609 BC, was September 21.² His brother Jehoahaz had been put on the throne by the Jews three months earlier, after Pharaoh Necho killed his father, Josiah, at Megiddo on a march northward to help the remnant of the Assyrian army withstand the westward push of the Babylonians (2 Chron. 35:20). At the end of the summer, Pharaoh Necho returned to Egypt.³ On his way back through Palestine, he deposed Jehoahaz (called Shallum in Jer. 22:11) and put Jehoiakim upon the throne as a more dependable vassal (2 Kings 23:28-35).



Thus, Jehoahaz continued his reign only a few days after the beginning of his first official year on the first of Tishri (September 21, 609), and Jehoiakim had to wait almost an entire year before his first official year began. That is why Jehoiakim was still in his third official year during the summer of 605 BC according to Daniel 1:1. But when we reckon Jehoiakim’s reign according to the Nisan system, which the Babylonians (and Jeremiah) used, he had to wait less than six months to begin his first official year in the spring of 608 BC. Thus, he would already have been in his fourth year in the summer of 605 as Jeremiah states (Jer. 46:2).



What appears at first sign to be a serious contradiction between Jeremiah and Daniel, as negative critics have long maintained,⁴ turns out rather to be a remarkable testimony to the accuracy of the Bible. Daniel, rather than Jeremiah, is the one who has usually been blamed for this so-called contradiction, because the discovery that the Tishri system was the one Judean scribes used for their kings is relatively recent.

But even if this problem had not been solved, it should be

pointed out that the critical view actually proved too much. Although noting that the book of Daniel was written *after* Jeremiah, these critics did not at the same time discern that the author of Daniel (an obviously brilliant historian) would not have deliberately contradicted the chronological statements of Jeremiah unless he assumed his readers knew he was using a different system. In other words, if the book of Daniel was *not* written during the sixth century BC, but was deliberately forged in the second century BC by an intelligent Jew trying to convince his contemporaries that his book had been written by Daniel four hundred years earlier, he would have been extremely careful to avoid obvious contradictions with the famous and canonical book of Jeremiah.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish near the Euphrates River (May–June 605 BC), his father, Nabopolassar, was still king in Babylon. Nabopolassar died on August 15, 605, and Nebuchadnezzar hurried back to Babylon to be crowned king on September 6, 605. Technically, therefore, he was not yet “king of Babylon” when he conquered Palestine following the Battle of Carchemish. This may be explained as a *proleptic* use of the term “king” (cf. Matt. 1:6, “Jesse was the father of David the king”).

Came to Jerusalem and besieged it (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chron. 36:6). It was once a commonplace of negative criticism to deny that Nebuchadnezzar could have besieged Jerusalem in 605 BC. In 1956, however, a cuneiform tablet was published that revealed that Nebuchadnezzar “conquered the whole area of the *Hatti-country*” after the Battle of Carchemish in May–June 605. The term *Hatti-country* covers all of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine.⁵

1:2. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.

The Lord: This is the Hebrew name *Adonai*; not *Yahweh* (Jehovah), which occurs only in chapter nine. *Adonai* speaks of God as supreme master. The significance of using his name here is to say that, though outward signs did not seem to show it, God was the master of this situation, as Jehoiakim was given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. It was not Nebuchadnezzar's strength nor Jehoiakim's weakness that really decided the matter, but God's good pleasure. Kings like to think of themselves sufficient as rulers, but they are as much under the supreme control of God as any person. There is comfort in knowing that no governmental authority can go beyond the bounds permitted by God.⁶

Jehoiakim, king of Judah, had been a vassal of Pharaoh Necho since the beginning of his reign in 609 BC. Now he was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, who "bound him with bronze chains to take him to Babylon" (2 Chron. 36:6). It was probably because of the sudden death in Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, that he was not actually deported, however. Instead, Jehoiakim was forced to swear loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar as his vassal, and Nebuchadnezzar took the short route to Babylon across the Arabian desert, sending some prisoners (including Daniel) the long way around.⁷

Jehoiakim had little intention of keeping his vows to Nebuchadnezzar, judging from the treatment he accorded the prophet Jeremiah, who counseled submission to the Babylonians. In December 604 BC, Jehoiakim cut to pieces Jeremiah's scroll of prophecies (Jer. 36:9–32), including the prophecy of seventy years' captivity under Babylon (Jer. 25:1–11). After only three years of submission

to Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim attempted to throw off the yoke but was sorely chastened for his rebellion (2 Kings 24:1–2).

Along with some of the vessels of the house of God. Nebuchadnezzar shrewdly took enough of the sacred vessels to demonstrate the superiority of his god over the God of the Jews but left enough in the temple so the Jews would be able to carry on their ceremonies unhindered and thus be less likely to rebel against their new overlord. In 586 BC, however, totally exasperated by the disloyalty of the Jewish kings and rulers, Nebuchadnezzar ordered *all* the sacred vessels to be destroyed or carried off to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:18).

To the land of Shinar, to the house of his god. Shinar was southern Mesopotamia, or Babylonia (cf. Gen. 10:10). Here the Tower of Babel had been built (Gen. 11:2) and continued in Scripture to have “the nuance of a place hostile to faith. . . . the place to which wickedness is banished (Zec 5:11).”⁸

Nebuchadnezzar’s god was *Marduk*, after whom he named his son Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk), because he was the chief deity of Babylon (another one was Nebo, after whom Nebuchadnezzar was named). Marduk was sometimes referred to as Bel (=Baal), or “Lord.” Thus, Isaiah predicted the humiliating deportation of Babylonian deities in the form of idols at the time of the conquest by Cyrus in 539 BC: “Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; their images are consigned to the beasts and the cattle. The things that you carry are burdensome, a load for the weary beast” (Isa. 46:1).

As a typical polytheist and clever diplomat, Nebuchadnezzar took no chances with Israel’s God, Jehovah, and carefully enshrined His sacred vessels in Marduk’s temple in Babylon. Contrast the

treatment accorded these vessels sixty-six years later by Belshazzar (Dan. 5:1–4). After the fall of Babylon, King Cyrus (Ezra 1:7) and King Darius (Ezra 6:5) encouraged the Jews to carry these vessels back to their temple in Jerusalem.

1:3. Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials. The king commanded Ashpenaz to select several handsome, brilliant, teenaged boys from the royal family to be trained as representatives of Israel in the court of Babylon (not as mere hostages). Eunuchs often held positions of great power in ancient Near Eastern kingdoms because they served as power links between the king and the harem (where most palace intrigues and plots on the king's life seemed to be hatched). Often, the term *eunuch* (the translation used in the King James Version for the Hebrew word *saris*) was applied to any important official near the king. Potiphar, for example, was a *saris* even though he was a married man (Gen. 37:36).

Because Daniel and his three friends were under the jurisdiction of “the prince of the eunuchs” (κῆρυ), and nothing is said of their having wives and children, it has been assumed by some scholars that they were made eunuchs by the Babylonians. This was also the opinion of Josephus, the great Jewish historian of the first century AD (*Antiquities* 10:10:1), and might find support in Isaiah's prophetic warning to King Hezekiah: “And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away; and they will become officials [eunuchs] in the palace of the king of Babylon” (Isa. 39:7).

However, the exclusion of eunuchs from positions of prominence in Israel (Deut. 23:1) and the emphasis on Daniel's physical perfection in 1:4 (“youths in whom was no defect” [Heb., *mu'mu*]) suggest that he was not a eunuch.⁹ Jeremiah was not married either, and this was because God did not allow it (Jer. 16:2).

1:4. The literature and language of the Chaldeans. “These young men from Jerusalem’s court needed to be secure in their knowledge of Yahweh to be able to study this literature objectively without allowing it to undermine their faith. Evidently the work of Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk had not been in vain.”¹⁰

The language of the Chaldeans was not Aramaic, the commercial lingua franca of the Fertile Crescent, which was somewhat similar to Hebrew and which Daniel and his friends probably knew already; it was rather the official language of Babylon, a Semitic dialect similar to Akkadian.

The term *Chaldean* is used here and in 5:30 and 9:1 (as well as in other Old Testament books and also the Assyrian records) in a national or ethnic sense. But in Daniel 2 through 5 it is used of a special class of wise men. The only other known case of this specialized use of *Chaldean* is found in a statement by the Greek historian Herodotus (b. 484 BC), who traveled in Babylonia and told of “the Chaldeans, the priests of this god.”¹¹

1:5. That they should be educated three years. How could Daniel and his friends have had three years of training if they were taken to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar became king and completed their training during the second year of his reign (compare 1:18 and 2:1)? The answer is that they were taken captive in August 605 BC, but Nebuchadnezzar did not begin his first official year as king of Babylon until the first of Nisan in the following spring (April 4, 604). Thus, if the three years of training were academic years (inclusive reckoning), their first “year” of training could have ended just before Nisan, 604; their second year just before Nisan, 603; and their final year just before Nisan, 602, which would still have been the second official year of Nebuchadnezzar (ending April 9, 602).

The Decision of Daniel in Babylon, 1:6–16

1:7. The commander of the officials assigned new names to them.

Daniel—(*dāniyye'l*)—"God is my judge"

Belteshazzar—(*bēlt^ešāšsar*)—"Lady [wife of Marduk], protect the king"

Hananiah—(*hānanyāh*)—"Jehovah has been gracious"

Shadrach—(*šadrak*)—"I am very fearful (of God)"

Mishael—(*mīšā'ēl*)—"Who is as God?"

Meshach—(*mēšak*)—"I am of little account"

Azariah—(*āzeryāh*)—"Jehovah has helped"

Abed-nego—(*ābēd-n^egō*)—"Servant of the shining one (or Nabu)"¹²

In light of David's covenant that he would not take the names of other gods upon his lips (Ps. 16:4), some have assumed that Daniel and his friends would have betrayed their faith if they pronounced their own new Babylonian names. But David did not mean that he would not utter these names; rather, he would not use these names in prayer, believing that they could answer and bring blessing.

The names of pagan deities are often mentioned by writers of Scripture, but always in contempt. The very fact that Daniel wrote down these new names in his own book, even though they incorporated the names of Babylonian deities (Nabu, Belet, etc.), shows that he was not superstitious in this regard. However, it is interesting to find their Hebrew names still being used twice again in this chapter and also in 2:17, whereas in 2:49 and in chapter 3 their Babylonian names are used. Daniel's Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, does not appear again until chapter 4 (vv. 8–9, 18–19) and chapter 5. But as late as the events of chapter 5 (539 BC), not only the queen but also King Belshazzar himself refer to him by his Hebrew name! Apparently even pagans could

see that here was an Israelite whose love and loyalty to the God of his fathers could not be compromised.

All of the Hebrew names of Daniel's companions appear again in other books of the Old Testament in reference to others by the same name. Significantly, all of their Hebrew names indicate their relationship to the God of Israel, and in the customs of the time, connote devout parents. . . . All four of the young men, however, are given new names as was customary when an individual entered a new situation. (Cf. Gen. 17:5; 41:45; 2 Sam. 12:24–25; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17; Esther 2:7).¹³

1:8. He would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank. The point of this statement is not that Daniel was afraid of the physical effect of indulging in rich food, for he was a self-disciplined man. Nor can his refusal be based on Levitical food laws that marked some animals as ceremonially unclean, for there was no Levitical restriction against wine. Baldwin believes that “by eastern standards to share a meal was to commit oneself to friendship; it was of covenant significance. . . . The defilement he feared was not so much a ritual as a moral defilement, arising from the subtle flattery of gifts and favours which entailed hidden implications of loyal support, however dubious the king's future policies might prove to be.”¹⁴ There is no biblical evidence, however, that Daniel ever insulted Nebuchadnezzar. He may have discovered that the “vegetables” (*zero'im*, grain) were not offered to idols, and trusted God to vindicate his religious convictions in abstaining from other foods.

1:9–16. Please test your servants for ten days. Though deeply sympathetic to Daniel and his friends, Ashpenaz was afraid of

Nebuchadnezzar's anger if they suffered physically from the vegetarian diet. Possibly by divine direction, Daniel then asked "the overseer" (v. 11) for the special privilege of a ten-day experiment to demonstrate their physical superiority to all the other youths, who were eating the royal foods. By God's direction, this subordinate to Ashpenaz granted permission; the experiment proved successful, and the vegetable and water diet was continued for the remainder of the three-year training period.

The Progress of Daniel in Babylon, 1:17–21

1:17. God gave them knowledge and intelligence. Because of the special direction of God (as in the case of Joseph and Moses), Daniel and his friends found themselves immersed "in every branch of literature and wisdom" in Babylonia. C. F. Keil was correct in stating that Daniel "needed to be deeply versed in the Chaldean wisdom, as formerly Moses was in the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22), so as to be able to put to shame the wisdom of this world by the hidden wisdom of God."¹⁵

It is unwarranted to extend the application of this unique situation to all of God's people today, however. For example, Joyce G. Baldwin believes that "the Christian today must work hard at the religions and cultures amongst which he lives, if different thought-worlds are ever to meet."¹⁶ Although that may be appropriate in certain specialized situations, the danger of immersing one's mind in current expressions of Satan's religious perversions is enormous. It was not without reason, therefore, that God warned His people: "Beware that you . . . do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?'" (Deut. 12:30). The student of comparative religions quite often, in pride and complacency, seeks to maintain a posture of scholarly detachment and objectivity in such matters only to experience

subconscious and gradual spiritual poisoning. “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. God gave this unique privilege to Daniel, not to his friends. But even Daniel had no automatic knowledge of all supernaturally revealed dreams. For example, only after fervent prayer was Nebuchadnezzar’s dream revealed to him (2:17–23).

1:18–19. The king talked with them. Though Babylon was now the intellectual center of the world, and Nebuchadnezzar was its most brilliant monarch, Daniel and his friends exhibited wisdom that this great king and his kingdom had never known. Nor was it all purely miraculous wisdom. Much hard work and self-discipline were involved: “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings” (Prov. 22:29).

1:20. He found them ten times better than all the magicians. As in some modern European universities, it is possible that only one examination was given—at the end of the entire program. If a thousand questions were asked, Daniel and his friends presumably gave nothing but correct answers (his wisdom was God-given, according to v. 17), whereas the next highest scores were 100 or less. On the other hand, it is quite probable that “ten times better” is to be understood in this context as a figure of speech, not a mathematical measurement. Compare 3:19 where the furnace is said to have been heated seven times more than normally.¹⁷

About ten years after this, another Hebrew prophet in exile in Babylon, Ezekiel the priest, referred to Daniel as a righteous man comparable to Noah and Job (Ezek. 14:14, 20). Speaking sarcastically of the boasted wisdom of Ittiobalus II, king of Tyre,

Ezekiel wrote: "Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is a match for you" (28:3).

Many scholars have denied that these statements refer to the Daniel we know and believe they refer instead to a mythological hero in Ugaritic literature dating to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries BC. He is there described as "Dan'el the Rapha-man . . . upright, sitting before the gate . . . judging the cause of the widow, adjudicating the case of the fatherless."¹⁸

These scholars point out that Ezekiel spells the name *Dani'el* as in the Ugaritic myth and not *Daniyy'el*, as in the book of Daniel. Furthermore, since Noah and Job were ancient heroes of the faith, it is claimed that it would be appropriate for the third hero mentioned by Ezekiel to be ancient also, instead of being Ezekiel's own contemporary. Liberals, of course, are predisposed to hold such a view, for they believe that the book of Daniel was not written until 164 BC, long after the time of Ezekiel.

It is now widely conceded that even though Ezekiel's spelling is slightly different from that of his contemporary, that proves nothing; for in personal names the vowel letters were in free variation with one another, just as *Do'eg* the Edomite (1 Samuel 21:7; 22:9) is spelled *Doyeg* in 1 Samuel 22:18, 22.¹⁹

Even more devastating to the critical view is the recognition that the context of Ezekiel's reference to Noah, Daniel, and Job involves a powerful denunciation of the worship of Phoenician-Canaanite gods (Ezek. 14:1–13). In the light of that, Harold H. P. Dressler asks: "Is it conceivable that the same prophet would choose a Phoenician-Canaanite devotee of Baal as his outstanding example of righteousness? Within the context of Ezekiel this seems to be a preposterous suggestion."²⁰

It must be recognized that Daniel's wisdom had become proverbial as early as 602 BC (Dan. 2:1), at least ten years before

Ezekiel spoke of it (Ezek. 28:3). Thus, instead of being an embarrassment to the traditional view of the date of Daniel, Ezekiel's statement is a beautiful confirmation of it. The Scriptures themselves are their own best confirmation and authentication.

1:21. Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king.

In view of the fact that Daniel received his final revelation in the third year of Cyrus (Dan. 10:1, 536–35 BC), this statement is considered by some to be a contradiction within the book. The answer to this criticism is twofold:

First, even if we did not know how to solve this problem, it surely would be the better part of wisdom to assume that the author did not deliberately contradict himself, especially since even the negative critics agree that he was a brilliant historian.²¹ Second, there is a perfectly natural explanation for this supposed contradiction, namely, that we have here a chronological point of reference that does not demand a termination. For example, if a mother said to her child, “Now be good until I come home,” she would not thereby be implying that *after* she came home the child need no longer be good. Daniel is not telling us in this verse how far into the reign of Cyrus he lived; he is simply emphasizing God's amazing providence and grace in allowing him to live throughout the entire reigns of *Nebuchadnezzar* (604–562), *Evil-merodach* (562–60), *Neriglissar* (560–56), *Labashi-marduk* (556), *Nabonidus* (556–39), *Belshazzar* (553–39)—and even beyond the termination of the Neo-Babylonian empire into the reign of *Cyrus the Great of Persia*! This is comparable only to the ministry of Joseph in the court of the pharaoh, from the age of thirty to his death at the age of one hundred and ten. Truly, then, Daniel was a man greatly honored of his God, “like a tree firmly planted by streams of water” (Ps. 1:3).