



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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About the Times and the Book

The prophet Daniel lived in the sixth century B.C. During this period:

- Construction began on the Acropolis in Athens
- Mayan civilization flourished in Mexico
- Aesop wrote his fables
- Confucius and Buddha lived
- Greek art began to truly excel
- The Greeks introduced the olive tree to Italy
- The Phoenicians made the first known sea journey around Africa

The Book of Daniel claims to be written by Daniel himself, and the fact that it is written mostly (well into chapter 7) in the third person does not contradict that claim. It wasn't unusual for ancient writers to use the third person when writing about themselves, especially when recording an historical narrative. See Exodus 20 for an Example of God Himself switching between first and third persons – there are many examples of *that!*

The book appears to have been written during 2 or perhaps 3 different periods of Daniel's life, and in fact is written mostly in Aramaic, the official language of Babylon and the Medo-Persians, with the rest in Hebrew. Given the story of Daniel's life, that makes sense, as we'll see.

At the end of the day, we can let Jesus settle the question of who wrote the book of Daniel. Fortunately, Jesus took away all doubt on the matter. He told us that Daniel wrote the book of Daniel. In Matthew 24:15 He said, "Therefore

when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet...” Jesus is *very* likely to have cited the author accurately!

Timeline and Outline

605 BC	Daniel Refuses the King's Food	Daniel 1
604 BC	Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream	Daniel 2
585 BC	Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Plus 1!)	Daniel 3
582 BC	Nebuchadnezzar's Dream	Daniel 4
539 BC	Daniel Interprets Handwriting on the Wall	Daniel 5
539 BC	Daniel in the Lions' Den	Daniel 6
539 BC	Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts	Daniel 7
539 BC	Daniel's Vision of the Ram and the Goat	Daniel 8
539 BC	Daniel's Prayer and Gabriel's Answer	Daniel 9
539 BC	Daniel Comforted by the Angel	Daniel 10
539 BC	Daniel Prophesies the Overthrow of Persia	Daniel 11
539 BC	Daniel Prophesies Deliverance for Israel	Daniel 12

1:1-7, Nebuchadnezzar Conquers Jerusalem, Daniel Taken to Babylon

Jehoiakim king of Judah: This was a Judean king placed enthroned by the Pharaoh of Egypt. His name means “Yahweh raises up,” but ironically the LORD did not raise him up at all – Pharaoh did.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon: The name Nebuchadnezzar is a Hebrew transliteration of the Aramaic Babylonian name Nebu-kudduri-utzur, which means “Nebu protects the crown.” Nebu in the Babylonian religious system was the patron of the art of writing, and the god of vegetation. Yes, a rather weird combination!

Came to Jerusalem and besieged it: Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem because Egypt had invaded Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, who was a young prince at the time, attacked and defeated the Egyptians at Charchemish, chasing their fleeing army all the way down to the Sinai. Along the way (or perhaps on the way back), he took Jerusalem, which had been loyal to the Pharaoh and Egypt.

This was in 605 B.C., and was the first (but not the last) encounter between Nebuchadnezzar and Jehoiakim. There would be two later invasions of Jerusalem in 597 and 587 B.C.

Skeptics long argued that this attack on Jerusalem never really happened. While this particular invasion is not mentioned in the book of I Kings as one might expect, Josephus quotes the Babylonian historian Berossus, showing that the Biblical account of three separate Babylonian attacks on Judah is accurate (*Against Apion*, I 19, and *Antiquities*, X 11, 1). Commentator David Guzik notes that this particular attack is also documented by the Babylonian Chronicles, a collection of tablets discovered ca. 1887 and housed at the British Museum. Guzik goes on to say that when they were finally published -- in 1956! -- they gave us first-rate, detailed political and military information about the first 10 years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. L.W. King had translated and prepared the tablets in 1919, but then died. The tablets and his work were then neglected for four decades! Further excavations have also documented the victory of Nebuchadnezzar over the Egyptians at Carchemish in May or June of 605 B.C. Archaeologists found evidence of battle, vast quantities of arrowheads, layers of ash, and the shield of a Greek mercenary fighting for the Egyptians.

This battle campaign by Nebuchadnezzar was interrupted unexpectedly when news of his father's death reached him. He raced back to Babylon to secure his succession to the throne.

In the third year of the reign: Note that Daniel says this happened in the third year of Jehoiakim, and Jeremiah 46:2 said it was in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. Why? Daniel counted a king's years after the Babylonian method: the first year of a king's reign began at the start of the calendar year after he took the throne. Jeremiah used the Jewish method.

John F. Walvoord:

"It was customary for the Babylonians to consider the first year of a king's reign as the year of accession and to call the next year the first year... Having spent most of his life in Babylon, it is only natural that Daniel should use a Babylonian form of chronology."

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand: This was the deportation in which Jehoiakim, Ezekiel, and others were taken away. It is described in 2 Kings 24:14-16.

This was prophesied in Isaiah 39:7: "And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

This prophecy leads some to think Daniel and his companions were made eunuchs. The Hebrew term *saris* was used of literal eunuchs; but the word derives from a phrase that simply means to be a servant of the king. I don't think we can say one way or the other.

So why did God allow all this in the first place? Israel had – once again -- fallen into idolatry and the neglect of the Sabbath, which God takes very seriously. Read Leviticus 25:1-7 and 26:2-35 for God's view of the importance of the Sabbath!

Some of the articles of the house of God: Nebuchadnezzar did not take all the furnishings of the temple, only some. The remaining furnishings were either hidden before Nebuchadnezzar came or they were brought to Babylon later.

The confiscation of these items and their deposit in a Babylonian temple was a dramatic and blasphemous declaration by Nebuchadnezzar saying, "my god is better than your God."

Bring some of the people {youth} of Israel: Nebuchadnezzar not only confiscated holy things from the temple but also Judah's future – their best young men, probably 13 to 17 years old.

Who had the ability to serve in the king's palace: Nebuchadnezzar was a shrewd tactician. Taking these young men as hostages reminded the people back in Jerusalem that they should not revolt against the recently imposed Babylonian rule.

The king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies: Of course the Babylonian government would provide training for these young men in the ways of their government and culture. But having the same food and wine as that prepared for the king was intended to be a special honor. This would be enormously persuasive, a way of brainwashing these young men into fealty to the Chaldean way.

There is no question about how well these young men were schooled in the ways of Babylon. In fact, the first 7 chapters of the Book of Daniel are written in Aramaic, the common language of Babylon, rather than Hebrew, the native tongue of these men. Only after the historical narratives are complete do Daniel revert to writing in Hebrew, many decades later!

To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: Daniel tells us about four of these youths, and their new Babylonian names:

- Daniel (“God is my judge”) was changed to Belteshazzar (“Bel’s prince”)
- Hananiah (“Beloved by the LORD”) was changed to Shadrach (“Illumined by Sun-god”)
- Mishael (“Who is as God”) was changed to Meshach (“Who is like Shach”, which was a Babylonian goddess corresponding to Ishtar or Venus)
- Azariah (“The LORD is my help”) was changed to Abednego (“Servant of Light”)

Three years of training for them: The purpose of the good food, the new names, and the excellent education was simple; this was total indoctrination, with the goal of making these young Jewish men leave behind their Hebrew God and culture. Nebuchadnezzar wanted these young men to look to *him* for everything.

Multiple commentators note that Calvin wrote that Nebuchadnezzar knew that the Jews were a stiff-necked and obstinate people, and that he used the sumptuous food, in particular, to soften up these captive young men.

Perhaps Satan still uses such tactics to woo and tempt God’ faithful?

1:8-21, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah Remain Faithful

Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself...: The Hebrew word for “defile” carries the thought of polluting or staining throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Isaiah 59:3, Zephaniah 3:1, Malachi 1:7). That Daniel requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself tells us that he explained the *spiritual* basis for his request. He didn’t make it seem that he wanted to avoid the king’s food for any other reason (disrespect for the king, etc.)

Why would the food offered by Nebuchadnezzar defile a Jew? First, it would not have been kosher. Second, it was almost certainly sacrificed to idols. Third, eating the king’s food implied fellowship (public confession of agreement) with Babylon’s cultural – and religious – system.

Note that Daniel never objects to the new names given to him and the others, because he could not control what he was called. Daniel also did not object to the Babylonian education, because he could not control what he was taught. But Daniel did object to the food offered from the king’s table because eating it was

in direct disobedience to God's law, and it was something which he could control.

Of course wine was not sacrificed on altars as meat was, but it may have been dedicated to Babylonian gods, and therefore Daniel and his friends refused it along with the rest.

This request might have branded them as uncooperative, and could have spoiled all chances of advancement. As far as we know, other Hebrew youths did indeed partake of the food and wine. Daniel and his friends here are singled out as exceptions.

There's no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar was capable of great cruelty. He murdered the sons of one king of Judah before the king's eyes then immediately gouged out the eyes of the king, so his last memory would always be the murder of his sons (Jeremiah 39:6-7). Other rulers of Judah were literally roasted to death over a fire (Jeremiah 29:22).

But Daniel's request and reasoning were courteous and polite. He showed discretion. Making a stand for God or Jesus Christ does not mean we have to be obnoxious about it!

Please test your servants for ten days: Daniel saw the situation through the official's eyes and addressed his (legitimate!) concerns. He didn't want the chief of the eunuchs to pay the price for his (Daniel's) conscience and request made in faith. Daniel was willing to put himself and his faith in God to the test.

Daniel offered a godly, wise deal with the chief of the eunuchs. He showed the wisdom we are told about in James 3:17:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Charles Spurgeon (emphasis mine):

*"It is of no use for a man to say, 'I have made up my mind upon certain things,' and to keep doggedly fighting over those matters, while, at the same time, the whole of his life is unkind, ungenerous, and unlovable. Yes, by all manner of means be a martyr if you like; **but do not martyr everybody else.**"*

Vegetables to eat and water to drink: Vegetables would include all kinds of grains and plants, not strictly vegetables (not gluten-free). Basically, this was a vegetarian diet, avoiding the meat from the king's table was not prepared in a kosher manner, or was sacrificed to idols.

So he consented with them in this matter: This shows God at work through an unbeliever. The chief of the eunuchs had all the power in this situation. Daniel and his friends were seemingly completely at his mercy. Yet God stirred this man to consent with them in this matter.

At the end of ten days... they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh: Here too we see the hand of God at work. There was no reason why a vegetarian diet should make them appear better and fatter. Perhaps this diet would make them appear the healthy, or the same as the other Jewish young men who ate the king's food, but not better and certainly not fatter!

God gave them knowledge and skill: The special intellectual ability of Daniel and his companions possessed was not due to their diet, but instead to special gifting by God.

Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams: We'll read more about this later, but at this point it shows that purity of intent and faithfulness to God come before human enlightenment in grappling with divine mysteries.

None was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: These young men from Jerusalem were immersed in the study of Babylonian culture, literature, and religion; yet they remained faithful to God. The work of the prophets like Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk was not in vain. These four were **in** Babylon, but not **of** Babylon.

And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.: Daniel had a long, successful career in the worst of circumstances. He worked for tyrants who thought nothing of killing their staff and advisors, much less of firing them. His employer suffered the worst kind of hostile takeover when the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire.