

Daniel and His Times

by Sir Robert Anderson

The sermon explores the life of Daniel and the historical events leading to the Babylonian captivity, emphasizing God's sovereignty and the consequences of disobedience.

Scripture: 2 Kings 24:1, 1 Chronicles 5:2, 2 Chronicles 36:17, Jeremiah 29:10, Daniel 1:12, 2 Peter 1:21

Topics: "Prophetic Ministry", "Divine Judgment"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson delves into the life of the prophet Daniel, highlighting his unique role as a recipient of divine revelations rather than an inspired prophet. Daniel, living in the midst of luxury and pomp in an Eastern court, received visions and prophecies that were crucial for understanding the political history of his times. His life coincided with the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, showcasing the consequences of rebellion against God's decrees and the eventual destruction of the city.

Transcript

"DANIEL the prophet." None can have a higher title to the name, for it was thus Messiah spoke of him. And yet the great Prince of the Captivity would himself doubtless have disclaimed it. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the rest, "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" (2 Peter 1:21) but Daniel uttered no such "God-breathed" words.[1] Like the "beloved disciple" in Messianic times, he beheld visions, and recorded what he saw. The great prediction of the seventy weeks was a message delivered to him by an angel, who spoke to him as man speaks with man. A stranger to prophet's fare[2] and prophet's garb, he lived in the midst of all the luxury and pomp of an Eastern court. Next to the king, he was the foremost man in the greatest empire of antiquity; and it was not till the close of a long life spent in statecraft that he received the visions recorded in the latter chapters of his book.

1. My belief in the Divine character of the Book of Daniel will, I trust, appear plainly in these pages. The distinction I desire to mark here is between prophecies which men were inspired to utter, and prophecies like those of Daniel and St. John, who were merely the recipients of the revelation. With these, inspiration began in the recording what they had received.

2. To quote Daniel 1:12 in opposition to this involves an obvious anachronism. The word "pulse," moreover, in the Hebrew points generally to vegetable food, and would include a dish as savory as that for which Esau sold his birthright (comp, Genesis 25:34). To eat animal food from the table of Gentiles would have involved a violation of the law; therefore Daniel and his companions became "vegetarians."

To understand these prophecies aright, it is essential that the leading events of the political history of the times should be kept in view.

The summer of Israel's national glory had proved as brief as it was brilliant. The people never acquiesced in heart in the Divine decree which, in distributing the tribal dignities, entrusted the scepter to the house of Judah, while it adjudged the birthright to the favored family of Joseph;^[3] and their mutual jealousies and feuds, though kept in check by the personal influence of David, and the surpassing splendor of the reign of Solomon, produced a national disruption upon the accession of Rehoboam. In revolting from Judah, the Israelites also apostatized from God; and forsaking the worship of Jehovah, they lapsed into open and flagrant idolatry. After two centuries and a half unilluminated by a single bright passage in their history, they passed into captivity to Assyria;^[4] and on the birth of Daniel a century had elapsed since the date of their national extinction.

3. "Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's" (1 Chronicles 5:2).

4. The disruption was in B. C. 975, the captivity to Assyria about B. C. 721.

Judah still retained a nominal independence, though, in fact, the nation had already fallen into a state of utter vassalage. The geographical position of its territory marked it out for such a fate. Lying half-way between the Nile and the Euphrates, suzerainty in Judea became inevitably a test by which their old enemy beyond their southern frontier, and the empire which the genius of Nabopolassar was then rearing in the north, would test their rival claims to supremacy. The prophet's birth fell about the very year which was reckoned the epoch of the second Babylonian Empire.^[5] He was still a boy at the date of Pharaoh Necho's unsuccessful invasion of Chaldea. In that struggle his kinsman and sovereign, the good king Josiah, took sides with Babylon, and not only lost his life, but compromised still further the fortunes of his house and the freedom of his country. (2 Kings 23:29; 2 Chronicles 35:20)

5. B. C. 625.

The public mourning for Josiah had scarcely ended when Pharaoh, on his homeward march, appeared before Jerusalem to assert his suzerainty by claiming a heavy tribute from the land and settling the succession to the throne. Jehoahaz, a younger son of Josiah, had obtained the crown on his father's death, but was deposed by Pharaoh in favor of Eliakim, who doubtless recommended himself to the king of Egypt by the very qualities which perhaps had induced his father to disinherit him. Pharaoh changed his name to Jehoiakim, and established him in the kingdom as a vassal of Egypt (2 Kings 23:33-35; 2 Chronicles 36:3, 4).

In the third year after these events, Nebuchadnezzar, Prince Royal of Babylon,^[6] set out upon an expedition of conquest, in command of his father's armies; and entering Judea he demanded the submission of the king of Judah. After a siege of which history gives no particulars, he captured the city and seized the king as a prisoner of war. But Jehoiakim regained his liberty and his throne by pledging his allegiance to Babylon; and Nebuchadnezzar withdrew with no spoil except a part of the holy vessels of the temple, which he carried to the house of his god, and no captives save a few youths of the seed royal of Judah, Daniel being of the number, whom he selected to adorn his court as vassal princes. (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chronicles 36:6, 7; Daniel 1:1, 2) Three years later Jehoiakim revolted; but, although during the rest of his reign his territory was frequently overrun by "bands of the Chaldees," five years elapsed before the armies of Babylon returned to enforce the conquest of Judea.^[7]

6. Berosus avers that this expedition was in Nabopolassar's lifetime (Jos., Apion, 1. 19), and the chronology proves it. See App. I. as to the dates of these events and the chronology of the period.

7. 2 Kings 24:1, 2. According to Josephus (Ant., 10. 6, Ch. 3) Nebuchadnezzar on his second invasion found Jehoiakim still on the throne, and he it was who put him to death and made Jehoiachin king. He goes on to say that the king of Babylon soon afterwards became suspicious of Jehoiachin's fidelity, and again returned to dethrone him, and placed Zedekiah on the throne. These statements, though not absolutely inconsistent with 2 Kings 24, are rendered somewhat improbable by comparison with it. They are adopted by Canon Rawlinson in the Five Great Monarchies (vol. 3, p. 491), but Dr. Pusey adheres to the Scripture narrative (Daniel, p. 403).

Jehoiachin, a youth of eighteen years, who had just succeeded to the throne, at once surrendered with his family and retinue, (2 Kings 24:12) and once more Jerusalem lay at the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar. On his first invasion he had proved magnanimous and lenient, but he had now not merely to assert supremacy but to punish rebellion. Accordingly he ransacked the city for everything of value, and "carried away all Jerusalem," leaving none behind "save the poorest sort of the people of the land." (2 Kings 24:14)

Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah was left as king or governor of the despoiled and depopulated city, having sworn by Jehovah to pay allegiance to his Suzerain. This was "King Jehoiachin's captivity," according to the era of the prophet Ezekiel, who was himself among the captives. (Ezekiel 1:2)

The servitude to Babylon had been predicted as early as the days of Hezekiah; (2 Kings 20:17) and after the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy respecting it, Jeremiah was charged with a Divine message of hope to the captivity, that after seventy years were accomplished they would be restored to their land. (Jeremiah 29:10) But while the exiles were thus cheered with promises of good, King Zedekiah and "the residue of Jerusalem that remained in the land" were warned that resistance to the Divine decree which subjected them to the yoke of Babylon would bring on them judgments far more terrible than any they had known. Nebuchadnezzar would return to "destroy them utterly," and make their whole land "a desolation and an astonishment." (Jeremiah 24:8-10; 25:9; 27:3-8) False prophets rose up, however, to feed the national vanity by predicting the speedy restoration of their independence, (Jeremiah 28:1-4) and in spite of the solemn and repeated warnings and entreaties of Jeremiah, the weak and wicked king was deceived by their testimony, and having obtained a promise of armed support from Egypt, (Ezekiel 17:15) he openly revolted.

Thereupon the Chaldean armies once more surrounded Jerusalem. Events seemed at first to justify Zedekiah's conduct, for the Egyptian forces hastened to his assistance, and the Babylonians were compelled to raise the siege and withdraw from Judea. (Jeremiah 37:1, 5, 11) But this temporary success of the Jews served only to exasperate the King of Babylon, and to make their fate more terrible when at last it overtook them. Nebuchadnezzar determined to inflict a signal chastisement on the rebellious city and people; and placing himself at the head of all the forces of his empire, (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 34:1) he once more invaded Judea and laid siege to the Holy City.

The Jews resisted with the blind fanaticism which a false hope inspires; and it is a signal proof of the natural strength of ancient Jerusalem, that for eighteen months (2 Kings 25:1-3) they kept their enemy at bay, and yielded at last to famine and not to force. The place was then given up to fire and sword. Nebuchadnezzar "slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; he gave them all into his

hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon, where they were servants to him and his sons, until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah." (2 Chronicles 36:17-21)

As He had borne with their fathers for forty years in the wilderness, so for forty years this last judgment lingered, "because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place." (2 Chronicles 36:15) For forty years the prophet's voice had not been silent in Jerusalem; "but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy." [8]

8. 2 Chronicles 5:16. This period is no doubt the forty years of Judah's sin, specified in Ezekiel 4:6. Jeremiah prophesied from the thirteenth year of Josiah (B. C. 627) until the fall of Jerusalem in the eleventh year of Zedekiah (B. C. 587). See Jeremiah 1:3, and 25:3. The 390 years of Israel's sin, according to Ezekiel 4:5, appear to have been reckoned from the date of the covenant of blessing to the ten tribes, made by the prophet Ahijah with Jeroboam, presumably in the second year before the disruption, i. e., B. C. 977 (1 Kings 11:29-39).

Such is the sacred chronicler's description of the first destruction of Jerusalem, rivaled in later times by the horrors of that event under the effects of which it still lies prostrate, and destined to be surpassed in days still to come, when the predictions of Judah's supreme catastrophe shall be fulfilled. [9]

9. The horrors of the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Titus surpass everything which history records of similar events. Josephus, who was himself a witness of them, narrates them in all their awful details. His estimate of the number of Jews who perished in Jerusalem is 1, 100, 000. "The blood runs cold, and the heart sickens, at these unexampled horrors; and we take refuge in a kind of desperate hope that they have been exaggerated by the historian." "Jerusalem might almost seem to be a place under a peculiar curse; it has probably witnessed a far greater portion of human misery than any other spot upon the earth." --MILMAN, Hist. Jews.

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