

DANIEL AS THE EMBODIMENT OF EXILE AND REDEMPTION

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HOW LONG DID DANIEL LIVE?

The Book of Daniel begins each new section by stating exactly when it took place, allowing the reader to determine when Daniel lived. *In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it* (Dan. 1:1). As part of this campaign, Ashpenaz, the chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar, was ordered *to bring some Israelites of royal descent and of the nobility, youths without blemish to Babylon to be educated in the ways of the Chaldeans* (Dan. 1:3,4). Daniel was one of these young men (Dan. 1:6). While the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim was 606 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar first appeared before the walls of Jerusalem only in 598 BCE, leading to the rabbinic interpretation of *the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah* as referring to the third year of the rebellion of Jehoiakim against Nebuchadnezzar, as stated in 2 Kings 24:1.¹

Daniel is reported to have been in Babylon *until the first year of King Cyrus* (Dan. 1:21), 538 BCE. This means that Daniel spent 60 years in Babylon. This length of time "is considerable but not absolutely impossible."² Depending on how old Daniel was when he was taken as a youth to Babylon, he could have been in his seventies or eighties when Cyrus became king.³

The latest event recounted in Daniel 10:1 takes place *In the third year of King Cyrus of Persia*. This is when the long vision which concludes the Book of Daniel occurred. The vision ends with the angel's instruction to Daniel, *you shall rest and arise to your destiny at the end of days* (Dan. 12:13). While we are not told explicitly when Daniel died, the implication is that it was soon after this vision, following the model of Jacob and Moses, who give blessings intertwined with prophecies related to the distant future before their death.⁴ From the Book of Daniel itself we cannot definitively know how long

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Daniel lived, since we are never explicitly told how old he was when he was taken to Babylon as a youth, or when exactly he died.

DANIEL AND JOSEPH

The parallels between the Daniel and Joseph narratives are well known and well documented. Broadly, in both narratives, a young Israelite described as being good looking (Gen. 39:6; Dan. 1:4) is taken into captivity, yet ultimately rises to prominence after interpreting the king's dream. There are significant parallels particularly between Daniel 2 and Genesis 41. In both narratives the king is described as agitated (Gen. 41:8, Dan. 2:1). In both the king and his court are unable to interpret the dream (Gen. 41:8, Dan. 2:1-11). In both, the Israelite hero has someone at court who presents him to the king (the cupbearer in Genesis 41:9-13, Arioch in Daniel 2:25). In both narratives the Israelite dream interpreter states that the interpretation of dreams rests with God (Gen. 40:8; Dan. 2:28) and that God makes known what will come to pass (Gen. 41:25; Dan. 2:28). Both end with the hero promoted/rewarded by the king (Gen. 41:39-45, Dan. 2:48).⁵

There are also parallels in uncommon words and expressions used in both the Daniel and Joseph narratives, aside from phrases connected to the similar storylines. For example, Daniel and his friends *looked better and healthier* than the other youths (Dan. 1:15), the same expression used to describe the seven healthy cows in Pharaoh's dream, *yafot mareh u'briot basar* (Gen. 41:2). The term used by the chief officer to express his concern that Daniel will be unhealthy if he does not partake in the food allotted by the king, *you will look out of sorts* (Dan. 1:10), is also used to describe the faces of the cupbearer and butler after dreaming their dreams, *zoafim* (Gen. 40:6).

These parallels set the stage for commentators throughout history to make connections and comparisons between the Joseph and Daniel narratives. For example, *Midrash Tanhuma* (Miketz 2) compares the agitation felt by Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar after their respective dreams. Since the word used to describe the agitation of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:1 *va-titpa'em ruho*) is almost the same as that used for Pharaoh (Gen. 41:8 *va-tippa'em ruho*) except for one additional letter, we learn that Nebuchadnezzar was more agitated than Pharaoh, since he could not even remember his dream. This was elabo-

rated by Tosafot and Rosh in their interpretations of the Joseph and Daniel narratives.⁶

THE LIFESPAN OF DANIEL

We know that Joseph was taken into captivity *at seventeen years of age* (Gen. 37:2). At this age he was referred to as a *yeled* (boy) by his oldest brother Reuben (Gen. 37:30), the same term (*yeladim*) used to describe Daniel and his companions when they were taken to Babylon (Dan. 1:4). Furthermore, there is evidence that in ancient times Persian and Greek youths would begin certain training⁷ or enter the king's service⁸ at the age of seventeen. Although there is no explicit statement describing Daniel as seventeen years old when taken to Babylon and the court of Nebuchadnezzar, using this information from the parallel narrative of Joseph and applying it to Daniel⁹ leads to a startling conclusion. Since we determined that Daniel was in Babylon for 60 years, if he was the same age as Joseph when taken into captivity, he would have been 77 years old when Cyrus became king.

This figure is very significant. The angel Gabriel is sent by God in response to the prayer of Daniel to give him understanding regarding the future redemption of Israel (Dan. 9:22). This is after Daniel *consulted the books concerning the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord that had come to Jeremiah the prophet, were to be the term of Jerusalem's desolation – seventy years* (Dan. 9:2). Gabriel informs Daniel that *Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city until the measure of transgression is filled* (Dan. 9:24). The seventy weeks of years, 490 years, becomes the timeline for the redemption, detailed in Daniel 9:25-27.¹⁰ The expression used by Gabriel denoting the seventy weeks is *shavuim shivim*.

The first chapter of Daniel begins with his being taken into captivity and ends with the statement that *Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus* (Dan. 1:21), when the Babylonian exile came to an end with the Cyrus declaration (Ezra 1:1). Thus in the first chapter of his book, Daniel is presented as the living embodiment of Israelite exile, being taken to Babylon but surviving until the exile is over.¹¹ Having Daniel reach the age of 77 (*shivim v'sheva*) at the time of the Cyrus declaration, a number that echoes the idea in Daniel that history works in units of seven years and recalls the expression *shavuim shivim* from Daniel 9:24, further confirms Daniel's status as a repre-

sentation of the Israelites in exile, much in the manner that other prophets embodied or acted out their messages.¹² He reaches this symbolically significant age, a number which hints at the *shavuim shivim* when *eternal righteousness is ushered in and prophetic vision ratified* (Dan. 9:24), just as Cyrus declares the Exile is over.

THE TIMING OF THE LAST VISION

The latest event recounted in Daniel 10:1 takes place *[i]n the third year of King Cyrus of Persia*. This formula appears earlier in Daniel 8:1, *[i]n the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar* to introduce the second vision of Daniel. All of his visions take place either in the first (Dan. 7:1, 9:1) or third year (Dan. 8:1, 10:1) of a king's reign.¹³ Inasmuch as Daniel is reported to have served into the reign of Cyrus (Dan. 1:21), according to this literary convention, the latest possible time for a vision would be the third year of Cyrus.

It is significant that the Book of Daniel begins with the same formula, *[i]n the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah* (Dan. 1:1) and ends with a reference to Cyrus (Dan. 1:21), so that Daniel 10:1 may be seen as a parallel and conclusion to the events in the beginning of the book, completing the story of Daniel.¹⁴

According to our theory that Daniel was seventeen when taken into captivity and thus seventy seven when Cyrus began his reign, Daniel would have been 79 or 80 years old when he received his last vision.¹⁵ When he is told at the end of his final vision, *you shall rest, and arise to your destiny at the end of days* (Dan. 12:13), he is being told that it is time for him to die.¹⁶ Daniel thus embodies Psalms 90:10, *The span of our life is seventy years, or given strength, eighty years*.

The final vision of Daniel comes after Daniel reports that he *kept three full weeks of mourning* (Dan. 10:2). Rashi (to Dan. 10:2) and Malbim (to Dan. 10:1) explain that Daniel was mourning over the fact that the hoped for rebuilding of the Temple and complete redemption did not in fact take place with the beginning of the reign of Cyrus. The vision, taking place *In the third year of King Cyrus*, comes during the time described in the Book of Ezra when the initial

construction of the Second Temple had begun (Ezra 3:8) but was subsequently halted (Ezra 4:24).¹⁷ The hoped for redemption had not materialized.

One of the themes of the long vision recorded in Daniel chapters 10-12 is that the true redemption will take place at the conclusion of a long series of events that had yet to occur. At the end of his final vision Daniel still does not understand when the final redemption will occur, and he is told that it is a *secret and sealed to the time of the end* (Dan. 12:9). He is informed that it will not happen all at once, time will pass between stages of redemption (Dan. 12:11-12). This idea itself may be reflected in Daniel's life, with the expected redemption not taking place fully during his symbolic 77th year of life, the first year of Cyrus. Instead, his life continues as he wonders while still in exile when exactly it will occur, again paralleling the state of the Jewish People.

CONCLUSION

The chronology of events presented in the Book of Daniel, along with the parallels to the Joseph narrative, allow us to gain an additional insight into the mission of Daniel. Not only did he interpret dreams and receive visions dealing with the future redemption of the Jewish People, he himself embodied these visions in his own life. This is especially seen when we understand that he was 77 years old, a meaningful number in Daniel's visions, when Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Israel and build their Temple, although just as in the experience of his people, the full redemption did not take place at that time and many more years of waiting would lie ahead.

NOTES

1. H. Guggenheimer, ed., *Seder Olam* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1998) p. 216. See also S. Hakohen and Y. Kiel, *Da'at Mikra – Daniel* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1994) p. 2. This also conforms to the chronology known from the Babylonian Chronicle; see L. Hartman and A. DiLella, *The Anchor Bible – Daniel* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1978) p. 128.
2. Hartman and DiLella, p. 131.
3. However the figure of Darius the Mede is understood (Daniel 6:1, 9:1, 11:1), he is positioned in the Book of Daniel as coming before Cyrus (Daniel 6:29). On Darius the Mede, see Hakohen and Kiel, p. 134; Hartman and DiLella, pp. 35-36.
4. Hakohen and Kiel, p. 304.

