

# Daniel - A Prophet at the Crossroads of History

**Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru**

*Professor Ph.D.Dr.Habil. 'Timotheus' Brethren Theological Institute of Bucharest, Romania;  
PhD Supervisor "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania  
dr\_ionicarotaru@yahoo.com*

**ABSTRACT:** The paper analyzes the historical context and impact of Daniel's life, emphasizing his loyalty to God while living in an unfamiliar land and culture. Daniel was born around 625 BC, about the time Jeremiah was beginning his prophetic mission, about the time King Josiah was reaching the climax of his religious reforms. The land of Daniel's birth, the kingdom of Judah, was on an upward, positive slope, with religious reforms taking place as the prophet Jeremiah began his sermons to the people. The genius of the pagan world, Nebuchadnezzar, meets Daniel, the most intelligent man in the Hebrew world at the time. Daniel, at the turning point of history, through his personality, his earnestness and his prophetic vision, which he had taken upon himself, succeeded in conveying to King Nebuchadnezzar the three things: the intelligence, the power and the sovereignty of God, and this was to be conveyed to a whole world through the interpretation of the dream. So at a turning point in history, Daniel was able to light a light, and it would reach the end of history.

**KEYWORDS:** Daniel, prophet, Nebuchadnezzar, Babylonian bondage, 70 years of servitude, historical time

## **Introduction**

Often, we as people are not aware of the importance of the moment we are living in, because it seems to us that this is normal. Changing a system, changing a civilization is a much slower and much more unnoticed work to be fully aware of. Daniel lived through the time when his country, the kingdom of Judah, was conquered, and the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and they would remain for 70 years as slaves in Babylon. No Jew wanted to accept 70 years of bondage. They even had prophets who said that in 2 years they would return. One such prophet was Hananiah, son of Azur, a prophet of Gibeon, who said: „Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of the LORD'S house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried them to Babylon: And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, that went into Babylon, saith the LORD: for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon” (Jeremiah 28: 2-4)

But the prophet Jeremiah cried out loudly that they would not return for 70 years: „Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations” (Jeremiah 25: 8-12)

Daniel reading the books of Jeremiah knew this, he knew that the Jews would be in Babylon for 70 years, he knew when the time was near for his people to go home from bondage and he made preparations for this. Because the Jews at first did not want to accept

this situation, although the prophet Jeremiah told them very clearly that they would stay 70 years in bondage, especially since some prophets told them that they would return in two years, and precisely because they did not want to accept that situation of staying in bondage for 70 years, the first generation had to suffer and it was very hard for them. The second generation, who were born there in Babylon, began to settle in there, learn the language and integrate into Babylonian society. Daniel, however, did not integrate into Babylonian society, although he worked all his life in the Babylonian court, yet he remained a convinced Jew. He knew that Babylon, as an empire, would also pass away. After the Kingdom of Judah, the next empire to fall was the Babylonian empire. If the Jews had known and believed this, they would not have stayed in Babylon in 537-536 BC when Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem, but would have sold their houses, gathered up their coins and all returned and worked together to make Israel special, which the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah also spoke of. Some of the Jews thought that their time then was in Babylon, when already Babylon as an empire had ended its historical mandate.

### **Names, considerations, appreciations**

The name Daniel, of Hebrew origin, is also frequently found in the Christian world, a world that values characters from the Old and New Testaments. When a parent gives such a name to a child, he wants his son to grow up to be as intelligent as Daniel, as successful as he was, and as upright, loyal or faithful as Daniel was.

The name Daniel means - God is my judge. That is, it means that when you hear the name Daniel know that God is above you, He sees you, He knows you and in the end He will consider and decide everything in your favour. Daniel, in the Hebrew vision, is a name that causes you to behave correctly, cleanly, morally and beautifully. For whom does a name matter more, for the one who gave it, i.e., the parent, or for the one who receives it, i.e., the son? For the name giver, i.e., the parent, there is something very clear: the name given to the child represents his conviction and desire, knowing the biblical character Daniel, that his son will become like Daniel.

The name also has an influence on the child, because at some point, the child will want to know why he was given that name and will ask who was that Daniel? And the parents tell him: look who Daniel was, look what he did and when this child comes into contact with this biblical character, reading his history and his work, this history will influence him. But there are also situations where parents are not responsible enough for this and some names are given just to make it sound good or with reference to characters that will not be known about for some time. Let us go back to the time when Daniel and his parents lived. The Bible tells us nothing about his parents. The period of his birth, childhood and adolescence was a very troubled time, with many events taking place in his country. Historical and archaeological documents reveal the people's conception at that time. We often find the word *Elimelech* in the Bible given as the name of children. *Elimelech* = *God is my king*, or *Ahimelech* = *my father is king*. Thus, the name given to the children represented a certain religious conception, and could also represent a position of pride: *Ahimelech* = *My father is king*, which conveyed the idea: see, look, see who I am? My father is king and if my father is king, it means that I am the son of a king, i.e., a prince.

On some shards of pottery or found names, which meant: *God is a calf*. This fact shows that the pagan culture influenced the image of the Jew so much that he saw in his mind the calf, the Apis ox. Naming was a way of expressing religious conviction, which depending on certain religious knowledge at a given time, the child was given a name.

The Southern Kingdom, that is, the Kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and ended up in a religious decadence, the people no longer related to God in the right way and did not put such names, as we put Daniel's parents the name of the child, being

afraid to say: *God is my judge*. The name given to Daniel by his parents could also have been a message to other compatriots.

Daniel was born around 625 BC, about the time Jeremiah was beginning his prophetic mission, about the time King Josiah was reaching the climax of his religious reforms. So we can say that the land of Daniel's birth, the kingdom of Judah, was on an upward, positive slope, with religious reforms taking place as the prophet Jeremiah began his sermons to the people. The timing of his birth was not exactly a bad time. Probably his parents were also influenced by the finding of the Book of the Law (2 Chronicles 34: 14-16), by the great discussion that took place about it, by the beginning of the special interest in the Temple, and made him put all these events of the time into a beautiful name: *Daniel = God is my judge*, with the message to the people, that they as people have to relate to Him. This was the direction of the time. In Daniel's teenage years, about 15-20 years old, the spiritual reality of his country was much sadder. Already there was the next king, Jehoiakim, a very morally bankrupt king, with a very ugly, negative attitude, who led the people into great moral decay, and in the end, they ended up in Babylonian bondage. It is possible that during his teenage years Daniel was confronted with two things, namely: the positives he learned as a child from his parents and educators, and the political sea change that was in his time.

Daniel's parents were from the elite of Jewish society, they were not simple people, because the children who were chosen from the elite of society: „And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (Daniel 1: 3-6).

Daniel arrived in Babylon around 605 BC, and the Kingdom of Judah continued to exist until 586 BC, almost 20 years. At this time the Jews were very proud to have one of their own at the imperial court in Babylon. The Jews knew Daniel very well and he is cited by Ezekiel, a contemporary of his, among the great men who saved others: Ezekiel 14:12, Noah, Daniel and Job respectively. Noah saved his family, Job saved his friends (unless Job prayed and offered sacrifice for them) and Daniel, a contemporary of Ezekiel, saved all the wise men of Babylon, a fact that has become known to the whole world, namely that Daniel was a saviour of the wise men of Babylon.

### **Historical time frame - end of historical cycle**

Daniel was born around 625 BC, and was taken hostage in 605 BC, at about the age of 20, during which time great changes took place in the world of the time. After the death of King Solomon, the Kingdom of David was split into two unequal parts. Ten tribes in the north, with Samaria as their capital, formed the Kingdom of Israel, and two tribes in the south formed the Kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital. Being situated between the two great superpowers of the time, Egypt to the south and Assyria to the north, both these kingdoms were tempted to ally themselves with Egypt to face Assyria. Both kingdoms having the same fate because the unfortunate political alliance hastened their downfall (Doukhan 2013, 18).

At the time of his birth in 625 BC, the dominant power in the area was still Assyria, which had formed an empire throughout the Middle East, a power that had destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel as early as 732-722 BC, a power that had also threatened Jerusalem with occupation many times. This Assyrian power had more or less ceased its influence from around 631 BC, when the last great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal, ended his

reign and his life. With him came the end of Assyria's glory, until in 612 BC. Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was conquered (Diakonoff 1985, 124.), and in 608 the last remnants of the army, of Assyrian power, were completely destroyed and Assyria disappeared from the political scene of the world. So a great political power, which in Daniel's time is already disappearing.

The second great power of the time was Egypt, an ancient state, with very close relations with the Jews, and in many instances the Jews were under Egyptian influence. After a long period of weakness during this period, Egypt also reared its head again on the political world stage and tried to rebuild the old empire of the Pharaohs, coming with armies to the Middle East in a desire to recapture this area which included the Land of Philistia, the Kingdom of Judah, Phoenicia and part of Syria. So Egyptian armies would meet in Jewish territory, there would even be Egyptian-Israeli wars during this period, but the power that would rise during this time, very quickly, would be the Babylonian power. The Babylonians first break free from the Assyrians by 526 BC, through Nebuchadnezzar (658-605 BC), and in 605 BC, Nabuchodonosor II (Hebrew for Nebuchadnezzar), takes over, the Babylonians become a great power. For the name of this king, we will use in this study the transliterated version of the name in Hebrew, namely Nebuchadnezzar.

First, in 612 BC the Babylonians in alliance with the Medes will conquer the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and completely destroyed it. How did it come to this? The alliance between the Medes and Babylonians was cemented by a marriage, the daughter of the Med king, Cyaxares, named Ahmeta (Amytis) (Diakonoff 1985, 123), would marry the Babylonian prince Nebuchadnezzar, an alliance that would remain throughout the king's reign, with no conflict between the two, but Nebuchadnezzar, who was crown prince at the time, was sent with the Babylonian armies to destroy the last remnants of the Assyrians. The Egyptians intervened in this battle, who at that time, realizing the great Babylonian power that was rising on the stage of history, and not wanting the Babylonians to become a superpower, sided with the Assyrians, with whom they had in fact fought many times, but political interests had made them friendly enemies.

The Egyptians, on their way to Assyria to offer military support, encounter the army of the Jews of the Kingdom of Judah, led by King Josiah, who also intervenes in the war. The last strong king of Judah, Josiah, believed he would be much safer after the death of the great Assyrian king Ashurbanipal and saw the Babylonians as a great help in escaping the Assyrian yoke. So King Josiah, being a pro-Babylonian, went out with his army to meet Pharaoh Necho II, who was going to ally himself with the Assyrians and fight the Babylonians. The Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II had no intention of going to war with King Josiah's army, which is why he also tells him so that he knows this fact: „After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not” (2 Chronicles 35: 20-21).

King Josiah does not understand that the Egyptians have not come to fight against his country and so he enters into battle with the Egyptians (2 Chronicles 35: 22-24). In this battle the king of Judah, Josiah will die at Megiddo in 608 BC and so the Egyptians will come to dominate the Kingdom of Judah, on which they will put a heavy tribute, for several years 608-605 BC, because in 605 BC the great decisive battle took place between the two remaining great powers, Egypt, which wanted to regain its territories, and Babylon, which wanted to seize all the territories that had belonged to the former Assyrian empire. The decisive battle would take place at Carchemish on the Euphrates River in what is now northern Syria, and a few days after the battle of Carchemish, the Babylonians pursued the Egyptian armies and another battle took place around Hamath that summer, resulting in the complete destruction of

the Egyptian army. So after 605 BC we can say that the Egyptians disappear from the scene of the great powers of the time, remaining only in their own land, with unsuccessful attempts to return. Never since have the Egyptians reached the Euphrates with their armies.

Thus, on the stage of history at that time were the three great powers: Assyria, Egypt and Babylon. If Nebuchadnezzar's father, the king Nabopolassar, had not died that summer, Nebuchadnezzar might have conquered Egypt in 605 B.C. The death of his father, Nabopolassar, caused him to return with great haste to Babylon to take his throne (he was only crown prince at the time) and the Egyptians escaped because of this. He became king Nebuchadnezzar (Nabuchodonosor) II. He was called Nabuchodonosor II because Nabuchodonosor I was king of the Babylonian Empire from 1125 BC to 1103 BC.

But 605 BC is the first year the Babylonians arrive in Jerusalem. We do not know whether or not a battle took place, but we do know that the Jewish king, Jehoiakim, who had previously been pro-Egyptian, sides with the Babylonians and becomes a pro-Babylonian, swears allegiance to the Babylonians, remains on the throne, but to ensure his righteousness, the Babylonians will take a number of hostages, young men from the elite of society, highly educated young men, who will be taken to Babylon. This is when Daniel arrives in this group and is taken to Babylon (Daniel 1:1-4). After the time of King Josiah, Judah was no longer an independent nation, but a vassal of both Egypt and Babylon. Jehoahaz reigned about three months, Eliakim (Jehoiakim) reigned eleven years, Jehoiachin reigned three months, and Zedekiah reigned eleven years (2 Chronicles 36:1-11).

From the very beginning of history, the first to invent writing, the wheel, urbanization and the city, social classes, the structure of society, everything we call society today, in a word, will be the peoples between the Tigris and the Euphrates, who at first were called Sumerians, then the Akkadians were added, then came the Arameans, Chaldeans, Assyrians. All these peoples belonged to the Semitic group, the descendants of Shem. Among these Semites are the Jews. All of them formed the peoples of the Middle East, with the first civilization, the first culture, constructions, buildings, a rich literature, and a certain way of life that they imprinted on themselves. A civilization has two criteria for evaluation, namely: monuments and writings, and from the writings you can clearly see religion, which was the most important thing for all the Semitic people, and for the Babylonians their religious system would become their primary element.

This Babylonian civilization went through several stages: the first stage was that of Nimrod, which is biblical history with the Tower of Babel and all that he did as ruler. Then comes the first phase or imperial period called the Akkadian period between 2800 BC and 1950 BC. The leading representative of this period was King Sargon I (2371 B.C.-2315 BC) Then you can talk about ancient Babylon between 1900 B.C. and 1600 B.C., about 300 years, which has the most important representative, namely Hammurabi I, around 1750 B.C. This was the Old Babylonian period, a period that remains in history through the Stele of Laws or Code of Hammurabi, discovered and now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris. The following period was one of Babylonian decline and the rise of the Akkadians, also Semitic, also from the same system of culture, so that from 626 BC to 539 BC, which was actually the second stage of Babylonian civilization, the so-called Neo-Babylonian Empire, with its most prominent representative, Nebuchadnezzar II. In this period, in the last Babylonian period of power, in the new Babylonian empire, the Assyrians would disappear; the Syrians, also a fairly powerful people, would be completely assimilated, and the Phoenicians as well. The kingdom of Judah will also be conquered by the Babylonians and taken into slavery. The small Semitic states: Ammon, Moab and Edom will also be conquered and taken into slavery, so we can say that all the countries of that era, countries of Semitic origin, end up being conquered, dismantled, with their populations displaced to Babylon, and they disappear, leaving only Babylon. In 539 B.C., the same thing happens to Babylon, i.e., it disappears from the scene of history. This is the end of Semitic civilization.

It is within this framework that Daniel appears, as a representative of God, at the highest level of his time, in the phase of the Neo-Babylonian empire at the imperial court and even before the king Nebuchadnezzar, to communicate to this king the plans, the projects of God and to ask for his collaboration.

The fact is that these extremely great political movements: the Assyrian power, of which everyone was trembling at the time, fell, the Egyptian power also fell, and the Babylonians suddenly rose up in a flash, and they will also fall in a flash. What was happening? During this period a lot of prophets appeared. The first prophet is Nahum, who speaks of the fall of Nineveh (the capital of the Assyrian empire) around 660 B.C., before it happens. Then comes the prophet Obadiah, who talks about the total demise of Edom, then comes Habakkuk, who was a prophet-philosopher and who presents the sovereignty of God who sits on the throne and rules everything, i.e., he means that everything that happens in the world, the politics of countries, is not random. So, Habakkuk is saying that God is at the helm of all matters and He directs them, without them occurring at random. Then come the prophets Zephaniah and Jeremiah, two prophets who talk about the Day of the Lord and the judgment of God, telling people that what they saw then was actually God's judgment on people for their wickedness, their crimes, for all their transgressions that they had done.

Generally, in history, empires are presented in a positive way, in the sense that they have made some formidable constructions, that they had a large extension, that they had a strong military force, presenting the achievements, the temples, etc. Usually, only the positive things are presented, without looking at the negative side. How many people died in the imperial wars? How many houses, cities (fortresses) were destroyed in imperial wars? How many widowed women, how many orphaned children? How many populations were displaced? How many people became wretched? It is hard to count. How many people died for the erection of those monumental buildings?

This negative, painful side, human suffering, even if it was avoided by the historians of the time (historians of the imperial courts), was presented by the prophets. They analyze the situation and tell the believers that the time is coming when everyone will give an account and pay for their deeds, using the expression that the day called the day of the Lord will come for them. Later on, in their time Ezekiel and Daniel will come. So notice, at a time of great change in the political scene of the world, prophets appear, with a lot of explanation, so that people will understand God's sovereignty and trust in Him and choose God's plan.

We have in those times the divination of pagan cultures (we cannot call them prophets) who all presented only positive aspects of political factors. The king would come and ask the wise man (prophet, soothsayer): should I go and fight against a certain city or a certain people? Their answer was always: go and you will win. They never said that their kings would lose in war. In this period of the 6th century B.C. there is no evidence that any pagan prophet foretold the fall of Assyria, Egypt, etc. They only predicted victories. And some Jewish false prophets prophesied that in 2 years the servants and ships would return from Babylon, which did not happen. The court of King Nebuchadnezzar was full of pagan prophets, soothsayers, sorcerers, star-readers, etc., and these wise men of Babylon admitted their helplessness and said: we don't know, only the gods could do that (Daniel 2: 2,10-11). And the kings of the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Cir were put in a position to admit that the Great God, whom Daniel and his three friends worshipped, had come into contact with them. Nebuchadnezzar, that he had sent him a dream. And, in this way, God wanted these great men of their time to know that the fall of one empire or another is not a matter of chance, but is part of a divine plan, that after one kingdom there will follow another and another, that they will not last forever, and that in the end the Kingdom of God will be established and unlike these the final kingdom will have no end. The eternal defeats the ephemeral (Doukhan 2013, 44).

### Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar - two geniuses of antiquity

People usually refer to Daniel as a young man in Babylon, and to Nebuchadnezzar as a mature, older man of authority. Daniel's age when he arrived in Babylon is estimated at about 20 years. Nebuchadnezzar is known to have married Ahmeta, daughter of the Medo-Babylonian king Cyaxares, around 612 B.C., in the context of the Medo-Babylonian alliance to fight against the Assyrians, a deal sealed by the marriage of the two princes. Marriages then took place quite early. He could have been as young as 20. In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar is sent with his armies to the battle of Carchemish, is defeated there, returns to take his throne in 605, and from 604, the first year of his reign is chronicled and he reigned 43 years. To reign 43 years, you had to start reigning very early, very young. How old could he have been? 25 years old, maximum around 30.  $30+43=73$ , an age that people did not really reach in that period of antiquity. Nabopalassar, his father, lived to be 53. So between Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar there cannot be a difference of more than 5-10 years.

Daniel comes from a family of elite society, but not royal, while Nebuchadnezzar comes from a royal family, he was crown prince. They were somewhere close, but not equals. In 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar ascends to the throne of Babylon, and Daniel descends to the status of a slave, trapped by war, a hostage, and at this point the contrast between the two is stark.

The next step is their intelligence. Nebuchadnezzar was a very intelligent man. All his work shows his intelligence. He was concerned with schooling, with education, and his empire was not based on force and cruelty, as the Assyrians were, who would catch you and impale you or crucify you, but the Babylonians would take you and send you to school, and through education they were able to get much more out of those people.

Daniel was so smart in school (university) that he and his other classmates were noticed by the emperor 10 times, bright young men: „Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm” (Daniel 1: 18-20). Thus Daniel becomes one of the emperor's advisors, something that the monarchs of the time did not do.

Because Nebuchadnezzar valued school, he valued intelligent children, regardless of what people they were from: if he thought you were intelligent, he would take you with him. This says that Nebuchadnezzar was a special person. Daniel proved it. How? By exams. In the exams he and the other young Jews took, they far outperformed the other young students, their peers.

Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar - two very intelligent men. Those who have studied their case in depth have said so: Nebuchadnezzar was a genius of antiquity, considered the most illustrious representative of the ancient pagan world. If other kings were distinguished by their bravery in wars, by conquests, by military exploits, he was distinguished by culture, by intelligence, by the construction of the greatest and most beautiful city of antiquity, Babylon. Many have built, done great things, but what Nebuchadnezzar built bore the stamp of beauty, order, functionality, well thought out. Nebuchadnezzar created a city that was not only beautiful to look at, but also an important centre of the arts and intellectual pursuits. He is credited as the builder of Semiramis' hanging gardens, in a desire to remind his wife of her country, Persia.

The genius of the pagan world, Nebuchadnezzar, meets Daniel, the most intelligent man in the Hebrew world at the time. The name in ancient times spoke volumes. Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar is the Hebrew transliteration of the Akkadian name Nabu-kudurri-usur which meant: *May Nabu protect the border*. So, the name speaks of religion, faith. The god

Nabu, who they believed was powerful to protect the boundaries and the child. So, the parents entrusted the child to the deity, to be protected by it. *Daniel - God is my judge*. So, behave yourself because God knows you, knows you and will judge you.

We are discussing two strongly religious personalities, each very religious in name. In terms of his religion, Nebuchadnezzar imposed his deities, which can be seen in the 60-cubit golden statue he tried to force everyone to worship. Daniel, on the other hand, ignores the fact that he comes to Babylon from a defeated, conquered land, that the temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed and that his God has been mocked. Daniel knows one thing, and that is that his God is alive, that he is sovereign, and that he will remain faithful to Him no matter what. Two men, convinced to the depths of their souls of their gods, their religion, their faith, and it will be seen from his book that the conflict between them was in fact a religious confrontation. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to impose his deities, while Daniel was convinced that his God would resist because he was sovereign over all.

Daniel, if he was that smart in those schools it is proof that he had by then educated himself. You cannot get into college if you only have three grades. And to be able to get into college and be valedictorian means that in high school and middle school you were a very bright student. That means Daniel did well in Jerusalem.

We believe that Daniel was a student or a great admirer of Jeremiah. Why? Because we meet him in Babylon, reading the books of Jeremiah that were written after he went to Babylon. Where did he get them from? It is possible that Daniel asked his parents or family to send him everything else Jeremiah was writing, because he wanted to be aware of everything the prophet was saying. And if in Jerusalem Jeremiah was disregarded and thrown into prison, in Babylon Jeremiah was read, because Daniel writes clearly. I read in the books that 70 years had to pass: "In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:2).

Which books did Daniel read? In the books of Jeremiah: "And this whole land shall be a desolation, *and* an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations" (Jeremiah 25:11-12). "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10). So here was Daniel a man of the book, doing his best to keep up with the latest news coming from the mouths of the Hebrew prophets. The books Daniel read, his upbringing gave him a very correct ideological stance, remaining loyal to his God no matter what. Daniel compares his upbringing to Babylonian upbringing, regarding their religion, culture and literature. Huge difference. Heaven and earth. And Daniel was not descending from the level of Hebrew literature and culture to the level of Babylonian stories and mythology. He was way too low, but he was learning them to take the exams. Daniel was a man trained in Hebrew education, a man who only intellectually appropriates Babylonian education, but retains the moral, philosophical, religious structure and vision of Jewish life.

Daniel arrives in Babylon in the summer of 605 B.C. and enters the Babylonian university, where both the boarding house and the canteen were of the highest standard and his first challenge was food. As a result of the food and the victory he gained, Daniel gains physical superiority. The text says he looked better than the others, ruddy face, strong body, quick mind. At the time, these qualities were highly valued.

Daniel's first victory was on the physical ground, the simplest and easiest to see, and the Babylonians seeing this left him and his friends alone to continue eating like this, which could not be done with the Assyrians. The Babylonians seeing that the young men looked better,



were sharper in mind with that diet did not force them, because in the end the benefit was all the Babylonians.

Society often sees religious people as people with an undeveloped intellect, and science has a hard time accommodating religion's simplistic explanations. On the other hand, we often expect to find beauty and health in people who do not strain their eyes over books and do not spend their elbows studying in libraries. What Daniel tells us, however, is that intelligence and physical development are not mutually exclusive, which leads to the idea that man should give importance to all dimensions of the human being (Doukhan 2013, 26).

Secondly, the three years of school he attends make him and his friends the most intelligent, and the emperor himself notices his intelligence. Daniel's first step was physical. The second rung was the intellectual one. The third step was the spiritual, that is, religion.

Daniel gets to make a demonstration of physical, intellectual, and philosophical-religious superiority. These three steps elevate Daniel from the obscurity of a Jewish servant to the level of a very important figure in the empire. Daniel thus impresses the emperor with his intelligence, and as such he takes him to the imperial court. Then it is noted that Daniel's God was powerful (the three young men in the fiery furnace). Thirdly, it can be seen that Daniel's God is sovereign (he can shut the mouths of lions), that he is above all, that he determines the time for each kingdom.

The book of Daniel is not a negative book, a book of criticism, of pointing out evil deeds, not even the wise men of Babylon are criticized, but Daniel and friends pray for their salvation. Daniel and friends could say: good riddance to them, but no, they pray for them. Daniel is always positive, without specifically portraying evil.

Daniel, at the turning point of history, through his personality, his earnestness and his prophetic vision, which he had taken upon himself, succeeded in conveying to King Nebuchadnezzar the three things: the intelligence, the power and the sovereignty of God, and this was to be conveyed to a whole world through the interpretation of the dream. So at a turning point in history, Daniel was able to light a light, and it would reach the end of history.

Nebuchadnezzar was one of the few monarchs of the world who would recognize the sovereignty and power of the God whom the Jews worshipped, worship Him and proclaim Him throughout the kingdom.

## References

- D'yakonov (Diakonoff), I. M. 1956. *Istoriya Midii ot drevneishikh vremen do kontsa IV veka do n.è.* (The history of Media from ancient times to the end of the 4th century b.c.e.). Moscow and Leningrad.
- Doukhan, Jacques B. 2013. *Enigmele Bibliiei. Cartea Profetului Daniel* (The riddles of the Bible. The Book of the Prophet Daniel). Bucharest: Viața și Sănătate Publishing House.
- King James Bible. 2023. *King James Bible Online*. <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/>.