

APPENDIX H

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL

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INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The following notes are intended to supply the student with sufficient information on the historical developments that relate to the Book of Daniel. The Assyrian period will be briefly examined in order to reveal Babylon's rise to power, for it was in the power struggle between Assyria and Babylon that Judah (and hence Daniel) became involved. The crucial years between 609 and 586 BC will be examined in detail, for it is during these years that Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem and carried out several deportations of the Jews which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The attack and conquest of Babylon by the armies of Cyrus in 539 BC will be examined, and highlights of the Persian Empire will be noted. Because much of the prophetic material in Daniel relates to the conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great and the rise of the Seleucid Dynasty in Syria, highlights of the Hellenistic Period will be noted. Finally, the religious and theological nature of the Babylonian exile will be examined in order to appreciate the experiences of Daniel and his companions in polytheistic Babylon.

THE ASSYRIAN BACKGROUND

For nearly three hundred years prior to Daniel's time, the Middle East was dominated by the mighty empire of Assyria. This would be during the period of what is generally termed the Neo-Assyrian Period (900-612 BC). The expansionist tendencies of Assyria were fuelled by the desire to establish vassal states and enact tribute from them. During this time, outlying areas (e.g., Syria) made repeated attempts to rebel against Assyria. The Chaldeans were suppressed under Assyria during this period, despite attempts to gain their independence. The grip of Assyria was strengthened under the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC). His forces also invaded Israel during the period 734-732 BC (2 Kgs 15:29), and he annexed Damascus in 732. About this time, disturbances arose in Babylonia following the death of Nabû-naṣir (Nabonassar) in 734, which led to Tiglath-pileser taking a more direct hand in the affairs of Babylon:

. . . Tiglath-pileser himself marched to defeat the usurper and lay the tribal lands waste. He took over personal rule in Babylon in 729, participating in the New Year Festival under his native name of Pul(u) (so 2 K. 15:19; 1 Ch. 5:26).¹

Under Shalmaneser V (r. 727-722), Assyria instigated a three year siege against the city of Samaria (capital of the northern kingdom of Israel), which resulted in the fall of Samaria in 722 BC and the deportation of thousands of Israelites.² This was the collapse of the northern

¹D. J. Wiseman, "Assyria," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1:335.

² There is some confusion as to whether the actual fall of Samaria took place under Shalmaneser V or his

kingdom predicted by Isaiah which came as a discipline from the LORD for covenant unfaithfulness (cf. Deut 28–30).

Under the Assyrian king Sennacherib (705-681 BC), the city of Ninevah attained a greater place of importance. Previously, Ninevah shared the splendor of other royal cities of Assyria-Asshur, Nimrūd (Calah) and Khorsabad. Under Sennacherib, it became the capital of the land and one of the architectural wonders of the world.³ During Sennacherib's reign, the Babylonians again attempted to throw off the yoke of Assyria. The Babylonian king, however, was defeated along with his allies by Sennacherib near Kish in 703 BC. According to Wiseman, "Sennacherib plundered Babylon, deported 208,000 prisoners to Ninevah, and set up a young friend Bēl-ibni as ruler."⁴ Resistance to Assyria continued, until eventually Sennacherib had to sack the city of Babylon itself (ca. 689 BC). At this time, the statue of the god Marduk (the national god of Babylon) was carried off to Assyria. These events served to fuel the hatred of Babylonia for Assyria which continued for another 80 years or so when Babylon eventually defeated Assyria late in the 7th century BC.⁵

BABYLON'S RISE TO POWER

During the years 651-648 BC, under the reign of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669-ca. 627 BC), the Babylonians made an uprising against Assyria, but were unsuccessful.⁶ However, Assyria was weakening, especially during the reign of Ashurbanipal's sons when Assyria began losing territory. Phraortes the Mede made an attack on the Assyrians,⁷ and by 626 BC the Chaldean Nabû-apla-usur (Nabopolassar) had won independence for Babylon and was recognized as king there,⁸ although not accepted or recognized by Assyria. Nabopolassar was important, not only for his eventual conquest of Ninevah, but as the father of Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king of the Book

son Sargon II (r. 722-705 BC). Sargon II claims to have taken the city, but many scholars feel he may have been simply taking credit for an achievement of his father.

³ C. T. Fritsch, "Ninevah," *ISBE*, 3:539.

⁴ D. J. Wiseman, "Assyria," *ISBE*, 1:336.

⁵ Under Esarhaddon (r. 681-669 BC), there was some improvement in the relationship. Upon taking the throne, Esarhaddon restored Babylon (an eleven year project) which won over the Babylonians, and eventually returned the statue of Marduk to Babylon in a great ceremonial procession.

⁶ Oates observes, "Assurbanipal left a further and perhaps more important legacy to the modern world. A library, collected at Ninevah under his personal direction and discovered there by British excavators in 1853, has provided modern scholars with undoubtedly the world's single most important collection of cuneiform tablets. . . . including the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Creation Epic, the 'Babylonian Genesis'" (*Babylon*, rev ed. [London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 1986], 125).

⁷ The Medes were heirs to Elamite power in western Iran. Oates reports, ". . . they had been welded into a single kingdom by an able ruler, Huvakshatra, known to Herodotus as Cyaxares. In 614 Cyaxares marched on Ninevah; Nimrud was sacked, the walls of Assur breached and that city captured and looted" (*Babylon*, 127).

Nebuchadnezzar seems to have maintained friendly relations with the Medes, as there is little mention of trouble on the eastern frontier.

⁸ D. J. Wiseman, "Assyria," *ISBE*, 1:338. A mysterious ruler by the name of Kandalanu appeared as king of Babylon during the years 647-627 BC.

of Daniel.⁹ With Nabopolassar, a new dynasty began, which is generally referred to as the Neo-Babylonian or Chaldean Period.

Nabopolassar gained further territory from the Assyrians. By 614 Assyria fell, and by 612 the Medes and Babylonians marched up the Tigris to Ninevah. In fulfillment of the book of Nahum, Ninevah fell to the combined forces of the Medes, the Umman-Manda (perhaps the Scythians¹⁰) and the Babylonians in 612 BC. A remnant of the Assyrian forces attempted to withdraw west of the Euphrates river to be supported by Egyptian allies under Pharaoh Neco II. This led to the defeat of the Assyrians and Egyptians at Harran (609) and of the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BC.¹¹ These victories established Babylon as the dominant world power of that day, and set the stage for Judah's exile to Babylon.

JUDAH'S EXILE TO BABYLON

In the aftermath of Nebuchadnezzar's great victory at Carchemish in 605 BC, the small kingdom of Judah became a victim of this major international shakeup. To appreciate this development, however, it is best to back up and examine the reign of Josiah, Judah's last great king.

Chronological Factors

The following chart lists the kingships of Judah in this period.¹²

<u>Name</u>	<u>Coregent</u>	<u>Became King</u>	<u>Died</u>
Josiah		Sep 641–Sep 640	ca. July 609
Jehoahaz		July 609	ca. Oct 609
Jehoiakim		Oct 609	9 Dec 598
Jehoiachin	Sept 608*	Dec 598–Apr 597**	After Apr 561
Zedekiah		Apr 597–Aug 586	ca. Aug 586

* McFall notes that Thiele failed to consider Jehoiachin's coregency.
 ** McFall uses Mar 597 (not Apr 597).

A. Judah Under Josiah (יהוֹשִׁיָּאֵהוּ) - 641/640 - July 609 BC

Josiah reigned 31 (accession) years according to 2 Kgs 22:1 (= 2 Chr. 34:1).¹³ McFall concludes, "Josiah became king between September 641 and September 640 BC and died during

⁹ Sometimes spelled Nebuchadrezzar, but both forms are used in the Old Testament. See D. J. Wiseman for discussion (*Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon*, The Schweich Lectures, [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press], 2-5).

¹⁰ Albright, however, identified the Umman-Manda as the Medes.

¹¹ The victory of Babylon at Carchemish (605 BC) was led not by Nabopolassar himself, but by his energetic son Nebuchadnezzar. This marked the end of Assyria for good.

¹² From Leslie McFall, "A Translation Guide to the Chronological Data in Kings and Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:589 (Jan-Mar 1991), 45.

¹³ According to accession-year dating, the year in which a king comes to the throne is termed his accession year, and his first official year is that which begins with the new year's day after his accession (Edwin

Tammuz (25 June-23 July) 609 BC."¹⁴ The chronology of this period is very reliable, due to extrabiblical materials and two very firm dates. These dates are:

- 1) 2 Adar (15/16 March), 597 BC - Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took Jehoiachin prisoner to Babylon¹⁵
- 2) 9 Tammuz (18 July), 586 BC, the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar, when Jerusalem fell¹⁶

The dates can be completely confirmed by contemporary tablets of the Babylonian Chronicle now in the British Museum.¹⁷

Josiah was considered one of the "good" kings of Judah (he did "right" in the sight of the LORD). In his 8th year (Sep 633-632 BC), the Scriptures tell us that he began to seek the God of David (see 2 Chr 34:3). In his 12th year (Sep 629-628 BC), he began to purge the land of evil and idolatry. During his 18th year, the Book of the Law was found which had been neglected during the previous evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon. These events brought on a reform effort during Josiah's reign to turn the nation back to the LORD.

Under Josiah's reform effort, the southern kingdom of Judah experienced some measure of revival and turning back to the LORD. Unfortunately, this reform was somewhat superficial, an outward cleansing, though Josiah himself was classified as a king who did right in the sight of the LORD (2 Kgs 22:2), and he was credited with removing much of the occultic movement in the land (2 Kgs 23:24) and attempting to turn the nation back to the Word of God (2 Kgs 23:25). Linked with Josiah's reform movement was the prophetic and preaching ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. Despite these measures, God's judgment was already settled in light of the nation's disobedience to the Mosaic Law and particularly the evil reign of Manasseh of Judah. The time was ripe for the southern kingdom to be taken away in exile (Deut 28:41,65), just as the northern kingdom had earlier been exiled in 722 BC. This judgment was hastened along by the death of Josiah, and the descent of the international power struggle upon Judah.

During Josiah's reign, a fierce competition for dominance of the Middle East broke out between the three major realms of the day, namely, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Assyria's domination of the Middle East was coming to an end, and Babylon and Egypt were attempting to grab what power they could. Ninevah had fallen in 612 BC, thus marking the virtual demise of Assyria. However, the struggle continued on and even shifted to the west in the vicinity of Judah. In 609 Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt, in response to an urgent appeal from Aššur-uballit of Assyria, marched north through Palestine on his way to Haran to deliver his friend from an approaching Babylonian military force.¹⁸ Josiah, however, attempted to intervene with the Egyptian force and was killed (2 Kgs 23:29). Pentecost elaborates:

R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1977], 87).

¹⁴ McFall, 38.

¹⁵ Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (1983), 173.

¹⁶ Ibid., 189.

¹⁷ Cf. D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1956).

¹⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 446.

In 609 BC the Assyrians sought the help of Egypt, and Pharaoh Neco II led an army from Egypt to join Assyria. Josiah, the king of Judah, hoping to incur favor with the Babylonians, sought to prevent the Egyptians from joining Assyria and met the Egyptian army at Megiddo. Josiah's army was defeated and he was killed in this attempt (2 Kings 23:28-30; 2 Chron. 35:24).¹⁹

B. Judah Under Jehoahaz²⁰ (יְהוֹאָחָז) - July 609 - Oct 609 BC

Upon the death of Josiah, Jehoahaz was made king by "the people of the land" (2 Kgs 23:30) but shortly thereafter removed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (2 Kgs 23:31 = 2 Chron. 36:2). In fact, he was taken away in exile to Egypt (2 Chr 36:4; 2 Kgs 23:33; Jer 22:10-12). He reigned three months in Jerusalem. McFall adds,

. . . Thiele noted that the reign of Jehoahaz began in Tammuz (25 June-23 July) of 609 and ended three months later in September/October. Because Jehoahaz's three months spilled over into the next new year, Jehoiakim had an accession year lasting about 11 months.²¹

C. Judah Under Jehoiakim (יְהוֹיָכִים) - Oct 609 - 9 Dec 598 BC

Jehoiakim was 25 yrs old when he became king, and reigned 11 [accession] years (2 Kings 23:36 = 2 Chron. 36:5). McFall states, "Jehoiakim became king about October 609 and Thiele noted that Jehoiakim died on 9 December 598 BC."²² According to 1 Chron. 3:15, he was the second son of Josiah. His given name was Eliakim (אֱלִיָּאִים) but he was given the throne name of Jehoiakim (יְהוֹיָכִים) by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt.

Jehoiakim was the ruling king of Judah at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem in 605 BC when Daniel and his friends were taken away into exile in Babylon. Although placed on the throne by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, Jehoiakim was made subject to Babylon as the following account relates.

Following the capture of Ninevah in 612 by Nabopolassar (with help from the Medes), the Assyrians were forced to retreat to Haran. Nabopolassar, however, took Haran and in 609 repelled the Assyrians and their Egyptian allies who attempted to recapture Haran, and drove them west across the Euphrates River.²³ Thus Egypt still held sway over Syro-Palestine

¹⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, 1326.

²⁰ Jehoahaz was also known as Shallum (שָׁלֹמ; see Jer 22:11). In 2 Chron 36:2, he is called Joahaz (יְהוֹאָחָז).

²¹ McFall, 38-39. These events can be correlated with the *Babylonian Chronicle* now in the British Museum. Thiele observes, "These tablets give a year-by-year account of the interesting events that were then taking place. For the year 609 B.C., the seventeenth year of Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar, the account is that in the month of Tammuz, July, of that year a great Egyptian army went with Assur-uballit, king of Assyria, against the city of Harran which was near the Euphrates, and the attack continued to the month of Elul, September. That would give Jehoahaz a reign of three months in 609 before Necho returned and placed Jehoiakim on the throne in Tishri of 609. That was the commencement of Jehoiakim's accession year" (*A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, 68).

²² Ibid., 39.

²³ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 450.

during the years 609 to 605. From 609 until 605, Jehoiakim remained subject to Pharaoh Neco of Egypt as an Egyptian vassal state, forced to pay heavy tribute. In 605, however, Nebuchadnezzar (the commanding general of the Babylonian forces at the time) turned to the last remaining Assyrian stronghold, Carchemish. In 605, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Assyria at Carchemish once and for all, and he forced Egypt to withdraw from north Syria.²⁴ Nebuchadnezzar then pursued the Egyptian forces as far south as Egypt. It was at this time that he entered Jerusalem, forced Jerusalem to pay tribute, and took prisoners, including Daniel. From 605 onward, Jerusalem was subject to Babylon and incorporated into the Babylonian Empire. Tribute that previously went to Egypt now went to Babylon. It was also at this time that his father Nabopolassar died unexpectedly (by Aug 15/16, 605), and Nebuchadnezzar had to rush back to Babylon (Sept 7, 605). He remained there in Babylon until the turn of the year.

For the next three years (605-602) Jehoiakim remained a loyal subject of Babylon.²⁵ But then he attempted to rebel (2 Kgs 24:1ff). Merrill writes,

He then rebelled for some unexpressed reason,²⁶ retribution was swift and sure (2 Kings 24:1-2). Nebuchadnezzar sent troops from Babylonia and from some of his western vassal states such as Aram, Moab, and Ammon, and forced Jehoiakim to submit. The chronicler says that Nebuchadnezzar went as far as to bind Jehoiakim with shackles in order to take him as a prisoner of war to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6). Apparently he relented but as punishment stripped the temple of many of its sacred articles and took them to his own pagan temples in Babylon. Thereafter until his death in 598 Jehoiakim remained in subservience to the Babylonian overlord.²⁷

In 601 BC, Nebuchadnezzar engaged Neco II in a great battle near the border of Egypt, a contest that appears to have ended in a draw (with both sides incurring heavy losses). This indecisive outcome tempted Judah to free herself from Babylon and seek an alliance with Egypt. In 599-598 BC, Nebuchadnezzar marched into north Syria (his 6th year). Before the Babylonians could take Jerusalem, however, Jehoiakim died (ca. Dec 598 BC).²⁸

²⁴ Further information is supplied from the *Babylonian Chronicle*. Thiele reports, "According to the Babylonian account, Nebuchadnezzar inflicted a crushing defeat on an Egyptian army at Carchemish in 605, beat in into 'nonexistence,' and then 'conquered the whole of the Hatti-country'" (*A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, 68).

He adds, "The Babylonian account for that year states further that Nabopolassar, after twenty-one years on the throne, died on the eighth day of the month of Ab, August 16, and that Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon 'and on the first day of the month of Elul he sat on the royal throne in Babylon,' September 17, 605" (Thiele, 69; quote from D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.) in the British Museum*, 67, 69).

²⁵ Merrill does point out, however, that Nebuchadnezzar's first campaign after succeeding his father was in his first regnal year (604). "At that time he plunged deep into Palestine and took the Philistine city of Ashkelon" (*Kingdom of Priests*, 451).

²⁶ Malamat ("Last Kings," *IEJ* 18 (1968): 142-43) associates Jehoiakim's rebellion with the Babylonian conflict with Egypt in the winter of 601/600 B.C., which is attested to by a letter written in Aramaic from the town of Saqqarah. For the letter, see William H. Shea, "Adon's Letter and the Babylonian Chronicle," *BASOR* 223 (1976): 61-64.

²⁷ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 451.

²⁸ Oates reports that after Nebuchadnezzar sent troops to besiege Jerusalem, Jehoiakim died, perhaps in

D. Judah Under Jehoiachin²⁹ (יְהוֹיָכִן) - (Dec 598 - Mar/Apr 597 BC)

According to 2 Chronicles 36:9, Jehoiachin became king at age 8, although 2 Kings 24:8 states that he was 18 years old and reigned three months.³⁰ McFall understands the ten year difference to refer to a coregency of Jehoiachin with his father:

Jehoiachin became coregent in September 608 B.C. and was king from 21 Marcheswan to 10 Nisan (= 9 December 598 to 22 April 597 BC). Consequently Jehoiachin concluded his reign on 22 April 597 BC. The exact date of Jehoiachin's kingship can be given with some degree of accuracy because extrabiblical evidence indicates that Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem on 15/16 March, 597 BC.³¹ Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon on 22 April 597 BC, and this day marked the end of Jehoiachin's reign of three months and 10 days. Working back from this day places the commencement of Jehoiachin's reign in the early days of December and consequently Jehoiakim must have died on or around 9 December 598 BC, which confirms the prophecy of Jeremiah 36:30 that his dead body would be exposed to the frost of the night.³²

Hence, in March/April of 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem from Jehoiachin, and set up Zedekiah as king (another son of Josiah). Jehoiachin, together with his family, leading state and military officials, craftsmen and troops, were taken captive to Babylon (a second deportation). The total number of captives at this time was 10,000 (2 Kgs 24:14), and the prophet Ezekiel was also taken in this deportation of 597 BC. Although Jerusalem was spared, a heavy tribute was taken, including the treasures from Solomon's Temple and the

the siege but certainly before the main Babylonian army arrived (*Babylon*, 129).

²⁹ He is also called Jeconiah and Coniah, יְכֹנְיָהוּ (Jer 22:24).

³⁰ The *NIV* translates 2 Chron 36:9 as 18 rather than 8, although most Hebrew manuscripts do have 8. Either we have a textual problem here, or the ten year difference refers to a coregency.

³¹ Nebuchadnezzar's attack upon Jerusalem in 597 BC is confirmed by the Babylonian records. Thiele reports, "The Babylonian record for Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year, 598/97, is also of unusual interest. That record reads, 'In the seventh year, the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and encamped against [i.e., besieged] the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice [lit., heart], received its heavy tribute and sent [them] to Babylon'" (Thiele, *A Chronology*, 69).

He adds, "This is a striking confirmation from a contemporary Babylonian document of the biblical record of 2 Kings 24:10-17. According to his own account, Nebuchadnezzar started against Jerusalem in the month of Kislev, the ninth month of the Babylonian and Hebrew year. That month began on December 18, 598 B.C., so Jehoiachin must have been on the throne during the last days of 598. Jerusalem was taken on the second of Adar, the last month of the Babylonian year, which was on March 16, 597. So the three-month reign of Jehoiachin can be set with complete certainty as 598-597 B.C." (Thiele, 69-70).

³² McFall, "A Translation Guide," 39. McFall contends that 2 Chron. 36:9 is not a textual problem, but that Jehoiachin had a coregency of 10 years. In reference to 2 Kgs 24:8 which mentions that he was 18 when he became king, McFall notes, "Here and in 2 Kings 8:16 and 24:18 . . . the RSV translated the verb גָּלַךְ 'he became king' contrary (but not necessarily incorrect) to its usual practice of translating it 'he began to reign'" (40).

royal palace (2 Kgs 24:13). Jehoiachin remained a captive in Babylon for many years, but was eventually released from prison on April 2, 561 BC (2 Kgs 25:27ff).³³

E. **Judah Under Zedekiah** (Apr 597 - Aug 586 BC)

With Jehoiachin being deported to Babylon, his uncle Zedekiah was made king of Judah (2 Kgs 24:17ff.). His reign of eleven years culminated in a major rebellion against Babylon. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem (which lasted for 30 months), and eventually destroyed the city, the fall coming on July 18, 586 BC. At this point, Daniel had been in Babylon for almost 19 years, and was serving as an important official in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Not only was Jerusalem destroyed, but the Temple of Solomon (which had been built about 960 BC) was completely destroyed. This was the lowest point in the nation's history (see Lamentations), and must have come as very disheartening news to Daniel and his companions in Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah lived through all these terrible events in Jerusalem and witnessed the destruction of 586 BC.

To summarize, there were three major deportations of Israelites by Babylon:

1) 605 BC

This deportation was limited to a number of the nobility and leading youths of the city. Daniel and his companions were taken at this time.

2) 597 BC

In response to the rebellion of Jehoiakim & Jehoiachin, about 10,000 captives were taken to Babylon, including Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1-3; 2 Kings 24:8-20; 2 Chron. 36:6-10).

3) 586 BC

Zedekiah's rebellion brought on a long siege, which culminated in 586 BC with the city and Temple being destroyed, and many Jews being killed. Many more who were not killed were deported to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-7; Jer 34:1-7; 39:1-7; 52:2-11).

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BABYLONIAN PERIOD

The Neo-Babylonian Empire, which had been instigated by Nabopolassar of Babylon, reached its zenith under King Nebuchadnezzar. His rule began in 605 BC and lasted for some 43 years until 562 BC.³⁴ He is famous for the hanging gardens of Babylon (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) as well as for his destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. He was succeeded by his son Awil-Marduk (Evil-merodach) in early October 562 BC. During his reign, Daniel enjoyed great favor with

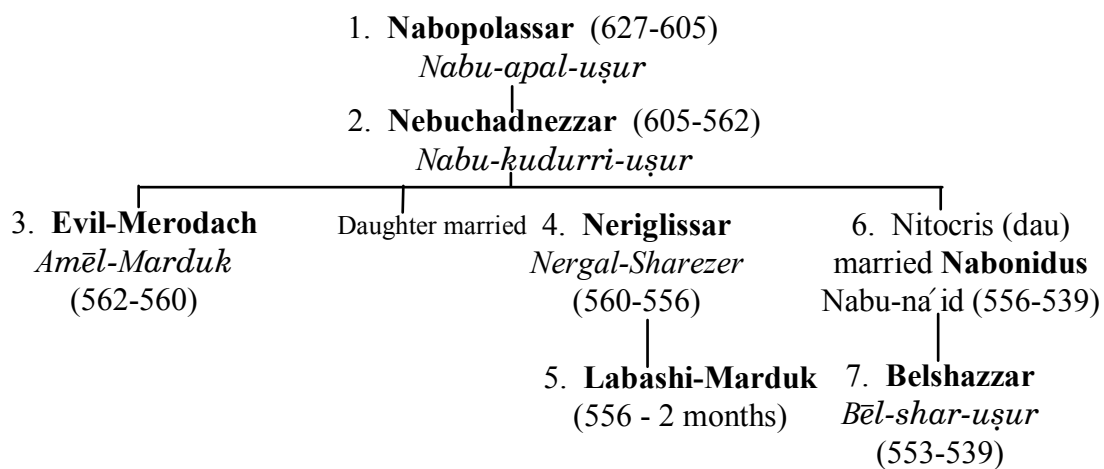
³³ The Babylonian Chronicle, extrabiblical literature which correlates much of the historical events, breaks off at 594-593 BC (a missing section) and does not pick up again until 557-556.

³⁴ Thiele comments on the certainty of the chronology: "Two eclipses establish beyond question 605 as the year when Nebuchadnezzar began his reign. The first took place on April 22, 621, in the fifth year of Nabopolassar, which would make 605 the year of his death in his twenty-first year, and the year of Nebuchadnezzar's accession. The second eclipse was on July 4, 568, in the thirty-seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar, which again gives 605 as the year when Nebuchadnezzar began to reign. No date in ancient history is more firmly established than is 605 for the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. The year 605 B.C. can thus be accepted with all certainty as the year when the first attack of Nebuchadnezzar on Jerusalem was made, and as the year when Daniel was taken to Babylon and when the seventy-year captivity in Babylon began (Jer. 25:9-12)" (Thiele, *A Chronology*, 69).

the king, and King Jehoiachin (who held the claim to the Davidic throne) was kept in prison at Babylon. Following Nebuchadnezzar's death, Jehoiachin was released. Thiele explains,

According to the Babylonian records, Nebuchadnezzar ended his reign and Amel-Marduk began his reign in early October, 562, which would bring the twelfth month of his accession year at the very time indicated in the biblical account. The release of Jehoiachin on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month, just before the beginning of the new year's festivities, would be a fitting time for the release of political prisoners placed in custody by the previous ruler.³⁵

The Neo-Babylonian Empire (as mighty as it was) was only short-lived, from Nabopolassar's rise in 627 until the defeat by Cyrus of Persia in 539 BC. The succession of Babylonian kings for this period is provided in the following chart.³⁶



During the final phase, Nabonidus and Belshazzar served as corulers. However, Nabonidus remained away from Babylon for much of this time. Anderson explains,

. . . Nabonidus came to the throne of Babylon (556-539). He was an unpopular king, especially with the priests of Marduk, who hated him for constructing a rival sanctuary to the moon god Sin. Nabonidus went off on a distant expedition to Tema in Arabia, and, after conquering the city, established it as his royal residence.³⁷

As for the religious character of Babylon, see Appendix I on the "Religious and Theological Background for the Exile in Babylon."

CYRUS' CONQUEST OF BABYLON AND THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

The end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire came in 539 BC when the armies of Cyrus captured the city of Babylon. The background to this is helpful for understanding the merger of the Medes and Persians into a force powerful enough to overcome Babylon.

³⁵ Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings*, 70.

³⁶ Source: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, 1326.

³⁷ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 469.

The Medes and the Persians shared a common heritage, as Merrill explains:

Both were descendants of Aryan tribal folk who had moved south to the Urartian plateau from Russia and who, by 1000 BC, had settled in the vicinity of Lake Urmia in what is now extreme northwestern Iran. Gradually the Medes moved east and occupied west Iran south of the Caspian Sea, while the Persians migrated far to the southeast and settled in southwest Iran toward the Persian Gulf.³⁸

Basically, the Medes held to what is today northern Iran, while the Persians held to southern Iran. Much of their territory was under the control of Assyria (to the west) while that empire dominated the Ancient Near East. Furthermore, the Medes were pressured by the Scythians to the north (what would be lower Russia today around the Caucasus mountain range between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea), and the Scythians dominated northwest Iran until about 625. About 625 BC, with the weakening of Assyria (keep in mind that Nabopolassar asserted his authority in Babylon against Assyria in 626), the Medes began to gain power and become more daring in their attempts to expand. They were led by Cyaxares the Mede and initially dominated over the Persians to the south, as Merrill explains:

... in time Cyaxares (625-585) overthrew the Scythians and the Assyrians, establishing Median control over all of northern Mesopotamia and Iran. He also reduced Persia to submission, setting up Cambyses as governor over that province. Cyaxares was succeeded by his son Astyages (585-550), whose daughter would be the mother of the great Cyrus II.³⁹

The Medes attempted to expand northwestward (especially toward Lydia, modern day Turkey), but any southwestern expansion was curtailed by the developing empire of Babylon, especially under Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, the Medes joined forces with the emerging Babylonians to overthrow Assyria.⁴⁰ In 612 BC the Babylonians and Medes combined to capture Ninevah, the death blow to the Assyrian Empire. From 612 until 550, the Medes and Babylonians seem to have respectfully tolerated each other without serious attack against one another. In the process of time, however, the Babylonians and Medes became bitter foes.

With the death of Cyaxares in 585 BC, the Median throne went to his son Astyages. His daughter (Mandane) gave birth to Cyrus II the Great, who would eventually become the great ruler of the whole Persian Empire. If the account of Herodotus is correct, Cyrus had a Persian father and a Median mother.⁴¹

³⁸ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 478.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 479.

⁴⁰ Merrill mentions that this alliance between Nabopolassar of Babylon and Cyaxares of Media may have been confirmed by a marriage linking their families (449, citing D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (625-556 B.C.) in the British Museum* [London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1961], 14). A. R. Millard writes, "After Median troops had sacked the ancient capital of Asshur, Cyaxares made alliance with Babylon, and one of his princesses married the crown prince Nebuchadnezzar (who built the 'Hanging Gardens' of Babylon to counter her pining for the Median hills, according to Berossus, *apud Josephus CAP* i.19 [141])" ("Medes; Media," in *ISBE*, 3:298).

⁴¹ There are conflicting traditions about Cyrus' origin. Clines points out, "Various stories concerning the birth and early history of this famous figure were of course in circulation in the ancient Near East, and of course may contain genuine historical information. According to the best-known of them, as told by Herodotus (i.108-122), Cyrus was the offspring of the marriage of Cambyses, the Persian vassal of the Median king Astyages, and Mandane, daughter of Astyages. . . ."

Initially, Cyrus was a vassal of his grandfather Astyages, ruling a region called Anshan. However, he eventually led a rebellion against the Median capital. He began to unify several Persian tribes around him and even made an alliance with Nabonidus of Babylonia. This culminated with a march against Ecbatana (the Median capital), in which Cyrus took Astyages prisoner and made Media itself a Persian province in 550 BC. In doing so, Cyrus laid claim to all Median territories.

The new realm was composed of both Medes and Persians, although Media no longer existed as an independent kingdom. Median influence was strong:

Cyrus made the Median capital Ecbatana (modern Hamadân) his capital, a position it retained beside Persepolis and Susa until Alexander's conquest (cf. Ezr. 6:2). Moreover, he adopted the system of government set up by Median kings and retained Medes in high office.⁴²

This domination of the Persians over the Medes, with their resulting merger helps explain the vision of the ram in Dan 8:3: "Then I lifted my gaze and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last." The text tells us in 8:20 that the ram with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. The horn that was longer and which came up last was Persia. Media's power was a mere 75 years, but Persia dominated the Ancient Near East for over 200 years.

Cyrus was famous not only for establishing the Persian Empire with the domination over the Medes, but also for his conquest of Babylon. Although Babylon was thought to be impregnable, the handwriting on the wall at the feast of Belshazzar was God's certain verdict: your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians. That very night (Oct 12, 539 BC), Babylon was captured by the armies of Cyrus, a historical fact well confirmed by extrabiblical sources.⁴³ Merrill summarizes the outcome:

Many Babylonian provinces such as Elam fell away to Persia, and in 539 Cyrus sent an army under his general Gubaru to invest Babylon itself. The city fell without a struggle, and Cyrus immediately made it the capital of yet another Persian satrapy, Babirus, which included Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine within its jurisdiction.⁴⁴

The conquest of Babylon by Cyrus fulfilled the words of Isaiah the prophet uttered about 150 years beforehand:

A different story was told by the historian Ctesias, a court physician to the later Persian king Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.). According to his account, Cyrus as the son of a Persian bandit and a shepherdess; he rose to a place of honor in the Median court and eventually led a successful revolt against Astyages" (D. J. A. Clines, "Cyrus," in *ISBE*, 1:846).

⁴² A. R. Millard, "Medes; Media;" in *ISBE*, 3:299.

⁴³ For an elaboration of the details of the conquest and a discussion of the figure called "Darius the Mede," see the notes in Appendix E ("Date and Authorship") under the topic of *Alleged Historical Inaccuracies*.

⁴⁴ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 480. Herodotus attributed the fall of the city to the diverting of the Euphrates into the depression near Aqar Quf. This permitted the Persian troops to enter the city along the river bed. Nabonidus was later captured in Babylon where, according to Xenophon, he was killed. Cyrus entered Babylon in triumph after his army under the command of Ugbaru (or possibly Gubaru, governor of Gutu) took the city. Cyrus forbade looting, appointed a ruler over Babylon, and left undisturbed the religious institutions and civil administration.

Thus says the Lord to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him, and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze, and cut through their iron bars. . . . For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known Me.⁴⁵

Even though extrabiblical sources do not mention a "Darius the Mede," Cyrus' respect and esteem for the Medes suggests that an appointment of a Mede as king of Babylon was entirely possible.

Following the conquest of Babylon, Cyrus ordered a decree to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and city that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. This too had been foretold in the prophecies of Isaiah: "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My Shepherd! And He will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid'" (Isaiah 44:28). Even the fulfillment of this decree was recorded afterwards by Ezra:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel, He is the God who is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-3).

This decree was issued in 538 BC, and Daniel (who had been taken as a captive to Babylon as a youth in 605 BC) was too old to return to Jerusalem by this time. He chose to remain and finish out his years in Babylon under the rule of the Medes and Persians. No doubt he rejoiced over the return to Jerusalem and to hear that the foundation of the Temple had been re-laid.⁴⁶

As for Cyrus, he continued expanding his empire, and died in combat in the year 530 BC. He had well established the mighty Persian Empire which assured a Persian king for the next 200 years.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

The mighty Persian Empire dominated the Ancient Near East from 539 to 333 BC. There were wars with Greece (which kept Persia from advancing on Europe), but Persia was the unrivaled superpower. All of this came to a crashing halt, however, in the 4th century BC with the appearance of the youthful Alexander the Great.⁴⁷ Following Alexander's victory at Issus, his destiny to dominate the world seemed certain. Beitzel explains,

As a twenty-year-old claimant to the Macedonian throne in 334 BC, Alexander set out with a mere 35,000 troops on a much more ambitious mission: Alexander intended to

⁴⁵ Isaiah 45:1-4.

⁴⁶ The Temple in Jerusalem was not actually completed until 516/515 BC (as a result of the ministry of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah). Hence it is doubtful that Daniel lived to hear of the completion.

⁴⁷ "Alexander the Great (336-323), son of Philip II of Macedon, was born in 356 and was taught by the philosopher Aristotle who was himself the star pupil of Plato" (Di Lella, *Daniel*, The Anchor Bible, 38).

demolish the mighty Persian Empire. Having won a narrow victory near Troy, Alexander liberated the province of Caria and the city of Side before turning inland to winter at Gordion. In the spring, Alexander marched south through the Cilician Gates, through which the apostle Paul would later pass, and re-entered the Cilician plains. In October 333 BC, the Macedonian's army collided with the Persian forces of Darius III at Issus . . . in one of the most pivotal battles of biblical antiquity. Classical historians Diodorus Siculus and Plutarch relate perhaps with some exaggeration how that with the loss of only 450 soldiers, Alexander's disciplined army killed some 110,000 Persians and captured even Darius's wife and family.⁴⁸

This victory at Issus allowed the Macedonian army under Alexander to sweep south, first taking Egypt and eventually the heart of Persia. In 331 BC (only a couple of years since the battle at Issus), Alexander went on to the final encounter with Darius III at Gaugamela, just east of the Tigris river. With an amazingly incredible speed, he conquered the world that had long been ruled by Persia. No wonder the Book of Daniel (7:6) describes him as a speedy leopard with four wings on its back!

The significance of Alexander's conquest of the world was that Greek influence (and language) was spread virtually everywhere west of India. This included Palestine, which set the stage for the Maccabean revolt many years later.

Almost as quickly as he came to power, Alexander left the stage of history. He died very suddenly in 323 BC, a mere 32 years old. Since there was no clear successor to his throne, a power play ensued for his Empire. By the year 301 BC Alexander's empire, the most extensive the world had ever known, was divided between four of his generals:

- 1) Ptolemy - Egypt and Palestine
- 2) Seleucus - Phrygia as far as the Indus (inc. Syria and Babylon)
- 3) Lysimachus - Thrace & Bithynia
- 4) Cassander - Macedonia

The rise of Alexander and the division of his kingdom into four realms was symbolically envisioned by Daniel in 8:8, Then the male goat (*Greece*) magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn (*Alexander*) was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns (*his generals*) toward the four winds of heaven.

The most important of these, as far as concerns Palestine, were the realms of Ptolemy and Seleucus. The successors of Seleucus ruled Syria until Pompey made it a Roman province in 64 BC. Unfortunately, Palestine was caught between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. The strife between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids is clearly foretold in Daniel 11. From the Seleucid rulers emerged the notorious Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a prominent subject of the Book of Daniel (see 8:9-14,23ff; 11:21-35). Antiochus ruled Syria (and Palestine) during the years 175-164 BC. The references in Daniel speak so clearly of him that critical scholars insist the book had to have been written after his time in power.

In the years 168-167 BC, Antiochus carried out a most despicable act of defiling the Temple and Jewish worship and went on to severely persecute those who resisted his attempts to Hellenize the country of Palestine. Upon Antiochus' return from his second Egyptian campaign in 168, he took measures to communicate that any insurrection would not be tolerated:

⁴⁸ Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 150.

Such opposition to Hellenization and Seleucid authority could only be interpreted as sympathy for Egypt, for only from Egypt could the rebels hope to receive support for the liberation movement. Therefore, upon reaching Jerusalem, he had the walls of the city torn down, slaughtered thousands of Jews, and sold many more into slavery (II Macc. 5:11ff). In addition, he himself entered the Holy of Holies.⁴⁹

But this was not the full extent of his atrocities. In December of 167 BC, Antiochus issued his persecutory decrees in which he attempted to force the Jews to transgress their commandments. McCullough describes some of his offensive actions:

Here the Jewish ritual was prohibited (1 Mac 1:45-6), and the sacred precincts were formally given over, on the fifteenth of Chislev, 167 BC, to the worship of Zeus Olympios (1 Mac 1:54; 2 Mac 6:2), whose Aramaic designation may have been 'Lord of heaven' (b`l šmyn.). The main structure of the temple seems to have been left intact, as well as the altar of burnt offering, although upon the latter a small pagan altar was erected (1 Mac 1:59; 4:44). It is generally assumed that this pagan object is the 'desolating sacrilege' of 1 Mac 1:54 (cf Dan 11:31).⁵⁰

This religious persecution involved far more than a desecration of the Temple itself:

The persecution not only involved a complete abomination of the Temple and the altar, but copies of Torah were burned, and Sabbath keeping and circumcision were forbidden. Furthermore, the Jews were forced to celebrate the king's birthday every month and to participate in the festal procession in honor of Dionysus. High places and altars on which swine and other animals were to be sacrificed were erected throughout Judaea, and inspectors were appointed by the king to make sure these measures were carried out.⁵¹

These offensive measures by Antiochus inspired the Maccabean revolt, recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. This revolt eventually succeeded and by 164 BC, the Temple was renovated and rededicated. Antiochus died insane in the same year. The temporary relief from Seleucid dominion would be short lived, for by 64 BC Pompey would bring the armies of Rome to overtake both Syria and Palestine. With the coming of the Roman Empire, the fourth beast of Daniel had come:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet (Dan 7:7).

Rome would rule for over 500 years until AD 476, but during the midst of this Empire the Messiah would come!

⁴⁹J. Paul Tanner, "The Rise of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and His Assault Against Judaea," May 5, 1999. See Appendix O.10.

⁵⁰ W. Stewart McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod* (University of Toronto Press, 1975), 115.

⁵¹ J. Paul Tanner, "The Rise of Antiochus IV Epiphanes," (Appendix O.12).