

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DANIEL

(Andrew E. Hill)

The book of Daniel contains nine date formulas (1:1, 21; 2:1; 5:30; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1, [cf. v.21]; 11:1). The earliest formula refers to the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim (i.e., 605 BC) and reports the first Babylonian invasion of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar (1:1). This means Daniel was among the first of the Hebrews taken captive by the Babylonians and deported to Mesopotamia, a fact that has significance for his later prayer (cf. 9:2-3). The latest date formula places Daniel in the Persian royal court during the third year of the Persian king Cyrus (537 or 536 BC; 10:1). This means the historical setting for Daniel is the Babylonian exile in the royal courts of Babylonian, Median, and Persian kings between 605 and 536BC. The dated portions of Daniel maybe outlined as follows:

1:1 — third year, King Jehoiakim of Judah, 605 BC

1:21 — first year, King Cyrus of Persia, 539 BC

2:1 — second year, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia, 604 or 603 BC

5:30 — last year, King Belshazzar of Babylonia/first year, Darius the Mede, 539 BC

7:1 — first year, King Belshazzar of Babylonia, ca. 553 BC

8:1 — third year, King Belshazzar of Babylonia, 539 BC ca. 551 BC

9:1 — first year, Darius the Mede, 539 BC

10:1 — third year, King Cyrus of Persia, 537 or 536 BC

King Josiah of Judah died in battle near Megiddo in 609 BC (2Ki 23:30). Perhaps obligations to the Babylonians motivated his attempt to intercept the Egyptian forces of Pharaoh Neco en route to Carchemish (23:29). Josiah was the last reformer and "good" king of Judah, and his death precipitated the rapid decline of the southern Hebrew monarchy. The last twenty-plus years of the Judahite monarchy saw four kings ascend to the throne. Two of these kings, Jehoahaz (609 BC) and Jehoiachin (597 BC), each ruled for but three months (23:31-34; 24:8-17). The other two were puppet kings of the superpowers competing for control of the land bridge of Syro-Palestine.

Eliakim/Jehoiakim (609-597 BC) was installed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (2Ki 23:34). He later surrendered to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia but rebelled three years later (ca. 603 BC; 2Ki 24:1-7). Nebuchadnezzar was unable to resume his military campaigns in Syro-Palestine until 598 BC but then moved swiftly to punish the disloyal vassal. By the time Nebuchadnezzar reached Jerusalem, Jehoiakim had died and Jehoiachin succeeded him as king of Judah (24:8). As a result of

the second Babylonian invasion of Judah, King Jehoiachin was deposed and exiled along with ten thousand citizens of Jerusalem (including Ezekiel; cf. 2Ki 24:10-17; Eze 1:1-2).

Mattaniah/Zedekiah was installed by King Nebuchadnezzar as a puppet king of Babylonia after the exile of Jehoiachin (2Ki 24:17). Zedekiah foolishly rebelled against the Babylonian overlord and allied Judah with Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt in 589 BC. The third Babylonian invasion of Judah was swift and decisive.

Nebuchadnezzar surrounded Jerusalem in 588 BC, and after a lengthy siege the city was sacked, Yahweh's temple was destroyed, and Davidic kingship in Judah ceased (24:18-25:21).



