

Daniel's First Verse

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[No serious student of the Old Testament can afford to neglect any fresh light thrown on the problems of the Book of Daniel. If the old "battle of the critics" over this book has ceased to "rage" as it did, at least the ground has yet to be cleared of the remaining problems in the growing light of a better day for all concerned. In *The Evangelical Quarterly* (October 1949) Mr. Bruce states: "The Book of Daniel is much to the fore in Old Testament studies at the moment, if one may judge by recent and forthcoming work on it." He adds: "The remarkable news that the recently discovered MSS in Palestine include fragments from two scrolls of Daniel (exhibiting portions of ch. i: 10-18; ii: 2-6; 3: 23-30) in Hebrew and Aramaic, possibly belonging to the late second or early *first* century B.C., gives hope of fresh light on the book from an unexpected source." Then he closes with this statement: "It must be gratifying to all students of the O.T., of whatever school, to see that *the defence of the conservative view of Daniel shows no signs now of going by default* (although only a few years ago this might have been feared)." Splendid! Now you will read this article (kindly supplied by Mr. Bruce) with all the keener interest, even if you have not before been actually aware of the problem it helps to light up from recent archaeological discoveries.—Editor.]

The book of Daniel opens with the words (R.V.): "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebu-

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chadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand...."

The chronological statement has been felt to constitute a grave difficulty, on the part of some who date the book in the sixth century B.C. as well as others who date it in the second century. So thoroughly conservative a scholar as Professor Aalders of Amsterdam, writing in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for July 1930 (p. 244)¹, states that there are "insuperable difficulties" in the way of dating Nebuchadnezzar's expedition in the third year of Jehoiakim. Among advocates of a second century date, Professor S. R. Driver expressed himself with characteristic caution on the point of such an invasion in Jehoiakim's third year: "Whether this is historically correct is doubtful" (Cambridge Bible, *ad loc.*).

Professor Aalders identifies the expedition of Dan. 1:1 with the one referred to in 2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chron. 36:6; Jer. 35:11; but finds it impossible to suppose that the expedition of these latter passages occurred so early as Jehoiakim's third year. He attempts to solve the problem thus presented by positing "a slight mistake in the Hebrew manuscripts" and suggests that we should read "sixth year" for "third year". Now, it is usually a course of desperation to assume a textual corruption for which there is no documentary evidence; and even if we accepted the emendation provisionally, we should have to revise our opinion as soon as we came to chapter 2 and found it dated "in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar". For Nebuchadnezzar's second year was Jehoiakim's fifth year, as Jer. 25:1 makes clear; Daniel could not

¹ [Now on-line at http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/daniel_aalders.pdf]

have been in Babylon in Jehoiakim's fifth year if he was not taken captive until Jehoiakim's sixth year.²

We may leave on one side for the present the question of the identification of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah in Dan. 1:1 with the invasion mentioned in 2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chron. 36: 6; Jer. 35:11. The latter invasion is usually assigned to a later period of Jehoiakim's reign. But is there any record of Babylonian activity some years earlier which might be brought into relation with the statement in Daniel? Hitherto there has been one such

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record, found in the fragment of Berossus which Josephus quotes both in his *Jewish Antiquities* x.II.I. and in his work *Against Apion* i.19. This quotation, excerpted by Josephus from the third book of Berossus's *History of Chaldaea*, includes the following information:

"When his father Nabopolassar heard that the satrap appointed over Egypt and the districts of Coele-Syria and Phoenicia had revolted from him, being no longer himself able to endure hardships, he placed a part of his force in charge of his son Nebuchadnezzar, who was in his prime, and sent him out against this satrap. Then Nebuchadnezzar engaged the rebel, defeated him in a pitched battle and brought the country which was under the other's rule into his own realm. As it happened, his father Nabopolassar fell ill about this time in the city of Babylon and departed this life after a reign of twenty-one years. Being informed, not long after, of his father's death, Nebuchadnezzar settled the affairs of Egypt and the other countries and also gave orders to some of his friends to conduct to Babylon the captives taken among the Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians and peoples of Egypt with the bulk of his force and the rest of the booty, while he himself, with a small escort, pushed across the desert to Babylon. There he found the government administered by the Chaldeans and the throne preserved from him by the ablest man among them; and on becoming master of his father's entire realm, he gave orders to allot the captives, when they came, settlements in the most suitable districts of Babylonia."

This excerpt refers, of course, to the battle of Carchemish, in which Nebuchadnezzar inflicted a decisive defeat on Pharaoh Necho in 605 B.C. Necho is referred to by Berossus as a satrap of the Babylonian Empire. He was, of course, an independent ruler, but the twenty-sixth Egyptian Dynasty, to which he belonged, originated in the family of the satraps who governed Egypt under the Assyrian kings after the conquest of Egypt by Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. When the Assyrian Empire grew weaker, the dynasty asserted its independence; but the Assyrians still regarded them as their satraps in theory, and so did the Babylonians when they served themselves heirs to the south-western part of the Assyrian Empire.

After the destruction of Nineveh at the hands of the Medes and Babylonians in 612, the last Assyrian king Ashur-uballit II set up his court at Harran, which however fell in its turn in 610. In the following year Ashur-uballit tried unsuccessfully to recapture Harran with an Egyptian force. This force was supplied by Necho, who saw in the break-up of the Assyrian Empire an

² As we shall see below, according to the Palestinian reckoning followed by Jeremiah, Jehoiakim's fifth year and Nebuchadnezzar's second year would be 604 B.C.; according to the Babylonian reckoning followed by Daniel Jehoiakim's fifth year and Nebuchadnezzar's second year would be 603 B.C. The three years of Dan. 1: 5, reckoned inclusively, take us from 605 to 603 B.C.; their mention incidentally confirms that "the third year" of Dan. 1: 1 is no scribal error.

opportunity to restore Egyptian dominance in south-west Asia to what it had been seven and eight Centuries before, and thought

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that the best means of attaining his ambition was to prop up the tottering royal house of Assyria. With this aim Necho went for several years in succession to the aid of the Assyrian king, and it was on one of these expeditions that he met and slew King Josiah at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29, where "against the king of Assyria" in R.V. should read "to the aid of the king of Assyria"). Necho showed his imperial intentions on his return from that expedition by deposing the newly anointed king Jehoahaz of Judah and replacing him by his own nominee and vassal Jehoiakim. But Necho made his last expedition to the Euphrates in 605, when Nebuchadnezzar defeated him and expelled him from Asia; "and the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken, from the brook of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt" (2 Kings 24:7).

Does Berossus imply that after the battle of Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar pursued Necho to the border of Egypt? In my judgment he does; indeed, the implication seems to be that, but for the news of Nabopolassar's death and the consequent necessity for Nebuchadnezzar's return to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar would have followed the flying Egyptians into their own country.³ In view of the fact that Jehoiakim was Necho's vassal and that Judah was practically an appendage of the Egyptian Empire, it would be surprising if Judah were not one of "the other countries" whose affairs Nebuchadnezzar "settled" before going back to Babylon. Daniel and his companions would then be among the "captives taken among the Jews" whom Nebuchadnezzar ordered his friends to conduct to Babylon by the normal route while he himself hastened home by a short cut. Josephus, indeed, says that after Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar "occupied all Syria, with the exception of Judaea, as far as Pelusium" (*Ant.* x.6.1); but neither Berossus nor the Biblical narratives told him that Judah was excepted; this is part of Josephus's own faulty reconstruction of the events of these years. How faulty his reconstruction is may be seen in the fact that he places the captivity of Daniel and his friends after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and calls them relatives of King Zedekiah (as of course they were, but the point of Dan. 1:1 is that they were relatives of his elder brother Jehoiakim who was then reigning).

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So far so good, but there is still a chronological difficulty. It is explicitly stated in Jer. 46:1 that the battle of Carchemish was fought in the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim, whereas the events of Daniel 1:1 are as explicitly dated in his *third* year. In former days an attempt was made to explain this apparent discrepancy by suggesting that the Hebrew word *ba*, translated "came" in Daniel 1:1, should really be rendered "went" or "set out" in this place, so that Nebuchadnezzar might be regarded as leaving Babylon in Jehoiakim's third year and arriving at Jerusalem in the following year. This explanation was unsatisfactory on several counts, linguistic and historical. The true explanation is much simpler. Jeremiah reckoned regnal years in the Palestinian fashion, Daniel in the Babylonian fashion. In the Palestinian fashion, a king's first year began on the date of his accession and lasted till the next New Year's Day, when his second year began. In the Babylonian fashion a king's first year did not begin until the first New Year's Day of his reign; the period between his accession and the following

³ "Nebuchadnezzar was already at the gateway of Egypt, when the death of Nabopolassar recalled him to Babylon" (N. H. Baynes, *Israel Amongst the Nations*, p. 98).

New Year's Day was called "the beginning of his reign".⁴ According to the Palestinian reckoning, the battle of Carchemish was fought in Jehoiakim's fourth year and Nebuchadnezzar's first year (cf. Jer. 25:1). But that year in the Babylonian reckoning (followed by Daniel) would be called the third year of Jehoiakim and the "beginning of the reign" of Nebuchadnezzar; it could also be called (as regards its earlier part) the twenty-first year of Nabopolassar, who died before its end. This is a complete and satisfying answer to the problem. It was propounded by the late R. D. Wilson in the first series of his *Studies in the Book of Daniel* (1917), by Dr. Albertus Pieters in an essay "The Third Year of Jehoiakim" contributed to the symposium *From the Pyramids to Paul* (1935), and by the two latest conservative commentaries on Daniel in the English language, *The Book of Daniel* by Dr. C. C. Lattey (1948) and *The Prophecy of Daniel* by Dr. E. J. Young (1949).⁵

The excerpt from Berossus has, however, been understood otherwise. It has been thought that Nebuchadnezzar, hearing of his father's death on the morrow of Carchemish, did not personally follow up the rout of Necho but returned to Babylon

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at top speed, and that the "captives taken among the Jews, Phoenicians, Syrians and peoples of Egypt" were taken prisoner in the battle from the forces of Necho's subject peoples who fought in his army. This interpretation of Berossus's account is hard to square with his wording. It is unfortunately no longer fashionable to study the polemical writings of Sir Robert Anderson, but some of our readers at least will remember how he handled Dean Farrar's summary of the events (in the *Expositor's Bible*), according to which Nebuchadnezzar did not "advance against the Holy City even after the battle of Carchemish, but dashed home across the desert to secure the crown of Babylon on hearing the news of his father's death". "The idea of dashing across the desert from Carchemish to Babylon", wrote Sir Robert, "is worthy of a board-school essay!" (*Daniel in the Critics' Den*, p. 16). True, Berossus says that Nebuchadnezzar returned home across the desert, but that was because he had been settling affairs in the Asiatic lands bordering the Egyptian frontier. The main body of his followers no doubt went home by the normal route round the Fertile Crescent, but he himself took the shortest way home. From Carchemish to Babylon, on the other hand, one does not go across the desert, but down the Euphrates.

In recent years a new piece of evidence has come to light which appears to support our interpretation of Berossus. It is an Aramaic document found in the course of excavations at Saqqara in Egypt in 1942, which proves to be part of a letter from a king of some district in south-western Palestine (apparently) to a king of Egypt (probably Necho) beseeching his aid in face of the activity of the king of Babylon. The document consists of nine lines of Aramaic writing, and only the beginnings of the lines survive. We append a transliteration, the vowels of which are necessarily conjectural, as of course they are not represented in the Aramaic script.

- (1) 'el mare malkan par'oh 'abdak 'adon melek
(2) shemayya we-'arqa u-ba'al-sharnin 'elah

⁴ The phrase "the beginning of the reign"—of Jehoiakim or Zedekiah—used in Jer. 26:1, 27; 28:1, has not this technical Babylonian sense; it simply denotes the earlier part of a king's reign, as is clear from Jer. 28:1, where it is actually Zedekiah's fourth year that is referred to.

⁵ These two commentaries have been reviewed by me in *The Evangelical Quarterly* for October 194", pp. 303-307.

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| (3) par`oh ke-yome shamin `amin zi | . | . | . | . | . |
| (4) ai melek babel `atho mut`o `apeq we-sh | . | . | . | . | . |
| (5) `achazu . . . we . . . k . | . | . | . | . | . |
| (6) ki mare malkan par`oh yada` ki `abd | . | . | . | . | . |
| (7) le-mishlach chel le-hatstsalti `al yishbeqin | . | . | . | . | . |
| (8) we-tabteh `abdak natser akm | . | . | . | . | . |
| (9) pechah be-mata wspr shnywy sp . | . | . | . | . | . |

This fragment has been studied by H. L. Ginsberg in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (Oct. 1948),

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by A. Dupont-Sommer in *Semitica* (1948, pp. 43-68), by J. Bright in *The Biblical Archaeologist* (1949, pp. 46-52), and most recently by A. Bea in *Biblica* (1949, pp. 514-516). The reading is in some points doubtful, and the interpretation in several points still more doubtful. Here, however, is a tentative translation, mainly following Bea:

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| (1) To the lord of kingdoms Pharaoh thy servant Adon king | . | . | . | . |
| (2) of heaven and earth and the god Baal-shamin | . | . | . | . |
| (3) Pharaoh steadfast like the days of heaven. What | . | . | . | . |
| (4) of the king of Babylon have come and reached Aphek and be | . | . | . | . |
| (5) have taken and | . | . | . | . |
| (h) For the lord of kingdoms Pharaoh knows that (thy) servant | . | . | . | . |
| (7) to send an army to deliver me. Let him not abandon me . | . | . | . | . |
| (8) and his goodness thy servant remembers and this region (?) . | . | . | . | . |
| (9) a governor in the land and | . | . | . | . |

When it comes to envisaging the lost parts of the letter, the element of conjecture is vastly increased. But the attempt must be made and there is a fair consensus of opinion that the general sense of the letter was as follows (the conjectural supplements are placed within brackets):

To the lord of kingdoms Pharaoh thy servant Adon king (of Ashkelon. May X, the creator of) heaven and earth and the god Baal-shamin (make the throne of the lord of kingdoms) Pharaoh steadfast as the days of heaven. What (I have written to my lord is to inform him that the soldiers) of the king or Babylon have come and reached Aphek and (begun... they have taken... and...). For the lord of kingdoms Pharaoh knows that (thy) servant (cannot stand against the king of Babylon. Therefore may it please him) to send an army to deliver me. Let him not abandon me (for thy servant is loyal to my lord) and thy servant remembers his goodness and this region (?) (is my lord's possession. But the king of Babylon intends to institute) a governor in the land...

The letter deals with a situation in which a king of Babylon threatens an Asiatic possession of a king of Egypt. The time at which such a situation could arise is not difficult to determine within fairly close limits, and these limits coincide with the last twenty years of the kingdom of Judah. The name of Adon's kingdom is unfortunately lost, but a reasonable suggestion is that it was one of the city-states of Philistia—possibly Ashkelon, as W. F. Albright. H. L. Ginsberg and John Bright have proposed, as well as Professor Bea. The only king of Babylon who can be considered in this connection is Nebuchadnezzar, whether as actually reigning or

as acting on his father's behalf (as at the battle of Carchemish).⁶ The Pharaoh of which one thinks is Necho. When Necho fled to Egypt after his defeat at Carchemish,

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his vassals (like Jehoiakim) were left to the mercy of Nebuchadnezzar. This particular vassal, King Adon, writes frantically for help, protesting his loyalty, and warning Necho that in default of help his kingdom, part of Necho's empire, will pass under Babylonian rule. As one commentator on the letter says, if Adon had had a Hebrew prophet at his court (as the kings of Judah had), he would at least have been warned of the futility of ever expecting effective aid from Egypt.

The letter is, of course, so fragmentary that we cannot be certain of its actual setting. The mention of Aphek is a clue to the whereabouts of Adon's kingdom, and that kingdom may well have been Ashkelon, if the Aphek in question is the place of that name ten miles north of Lydda. But we know of four places in Syria and Palestine called Aphek, and of these one at least has claims for consideration as the Aphek mentioned in this letter. That is the Phoenician Aphek (modern Afqa) east of Byblos. At the meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study in January 1950 an alternative possibility was put to the Society by the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge; namely, that we should view the fragment against the background of Pharaoh Hophrah's bid for power. Hophrah (588-569) took Tyre and Sidon and supported Zedekiah's revolt. After dealing with Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar may have moved his headquarters from Riblah to a point near the Phoenician Aphek to prepare for the siege of Tyre. In that case Adon might be the ruler of a Phoenician principality, who appealed for help to Hophrah in view of the proximity of Nebuchadnezzar.

But on the whole it seems to the present writer, as far as the fragmentary condition of the papyrus enables one to judge, that Albright, Ginsberg, Bright and Bea have made a more probable suggestion. To be sure, they would date the letter two or three years after Carchemish, concluding that Nebuchadnezzar went home to Babylon to secure his kingdom before dealing with the affairs of the south-western border-states; but it would seem more consonant with the account of Berossus to date it in 605 B.C. In that case, it provides an interesting link with the opening statement of Daniel. It also (whatever be its exact date) illustrates the extent to which Aramaic was used as the language of diplomatic correspondence at the time (as it was earlier under the Assyrian Empire and later under the Persian Empire). "Again", as Bright says, "that courtiers should address Nebu-

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chadnezzar in Aramaic as the story in Dan. 2 :4 has it, no longer appears at all surprising."⁷

The book of Daniel is by no means being neglected in modern Biblical research. Of recent years, in addition to the commentaries of Lattey and Young mentioned above, we have had

⁶ Daniel 1:1 is not the only place where Nebuchadnezzar is called "king of Babylon" by prolepsis while he was yet but Crown Prince. Jer. 46:2 is another instance.

⁷ Further Aramaic evidence for the later O.T. period is shortly to be made accessible. This is a collection of Aramaic papyri which has lain unstudied and unedited in America for fifty years, but which is now being edited by Prof. C. H. Kraeling of Yale and will soon be published. This collection (from Egypt) is said to be comparable in extent and importance to the collection of Aramaic papyri from Elephantine published some forty years ago, which so greatly added to our knowledge of Jewish affairs in the Persian Empire in the fifth century B.C.

conservative commentaries on the Continent by Garofalo (Turin, 1947) and Nötscher (Wiirzburg, 1948). We have had Gins-berg's *Studies in Daniel* (New York, 1948) and we are told that in Germany yet another commentary on the book is being prepared by Selmeier. The presidential address to the Society for Old Testament Study in London in January 1950 was devoted to an able and convincing defence of the unity of the book of Daniel. And it will be generally agreed that the book is one which deserves the closest study which scholarship can give it.

One last word. Difficulties have been found in fitting together the notices of Jehoiakim's reign and his relations with Nebuchadnezzar in the various books of the Old Testament which mention him. After his first submission to Nebuchadnezzar, immediately after Carchemish, in accordance with our present thesis, we may summarize his career in the words of Professor Norman Baynes (*Israel amongst the Nations*, pp. 99 ff.):

"Jehoiakim was permitted to rule in Jerusalem as a Babylonian vassal. The history of the reign of Jehoiakim is very obscure, but it would seem that, when he was released from his vassalage to Egypt (2 Kings 23: 35) by the defeat of Necho, the king of Judah seized his opportunity to attack his neighbours... (Ezekiel 19: 6-7).... At length the neighbouring peoples banded together against Jehoiakim, took him captive and brought him bound before Nebuchadnezzar who was perhaps in Western Asia in 602 suppressing a Syrian revolt. Nebuchadnezzar may well have regarded Jehoiakim's attacks upon his neighbours as a chastisement of the partisans of Egypt: Jehoiakim was reinstated in Jerusalem, and for three years (602-600?) he paid his tribute to Babylon; then he revolted from his overlord.

Nebuchadnezzar did not at first intervene in person, but incited others to attack the kingdom of Judah: Jehoiakim was assailed by bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites. At length (597 B.C.) Nebuchadnezzar himself marched to the West; Jehoiakim died and Jehoiachin, his son, a youth of eighteen years, succeeded his father. Jerusalem was invested, and to save the Holy City from sack and massacre Jehoiachin surrendered himself and his family to the king of Babylon."

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<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/daniel.php>
