

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 18/08/2012

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We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Num 15		Daniel 1-3	Romans 4-5
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Remaining Faithful (Numbers 15)

This chapter starts off on a positive, encouraging note. God says, “When you have come into the land you are to inhabit...” (verse 2). This might seem odd on the heels of the last chapter. But remember that despite what had happened, God had stated that the younger generation would eventually enter Canaan. And in giving various commands regarding the making of grain and drink offerings in the land, He was also reaffirming that promise.

Verse 19 refers to a “heave” offering, a term that may sound strange to our ears. The word heave means “to lift up.” It is thus the same as a wave offering. Here it is explained that the Israelites were to heave the first of each grain harvest. “Right at the beginning of the harvest, the harvester had to acknowledge that his produce was a gift from God. By holding up the very first produce from a harvest or the first cake made from the first grain of the season, the worshiper thanked God as the giver of all good gifts” (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 17-21).

The chapter then moves on to the subject of sin. When someone got mixed up or forgot to perform a particular duty, such a sin of ignorance could be readily remedied. But deliberate sins, or sinning “presumptuously” (literally, “with a high hand”)—in essence, defiantly shaking one’s fist in God’s face—was another matter entirely. It merited a severe penalty. Following in the chapter is an example of just such a situation—that of a man deliberately working on the Sabbath. The people didn’t know how to deal with such a willful breaking of the commandment, so they temporarily incarcerated him until they could get instructions. The law already stated that he should die (Exodus 31:15), but not the means of death. God told Moses the man should die outside the camp of Israel at the hands of the people by stoning. This way all Israel would participate in and realize the severity of the punishment and the absoluteness of God’s commandments. Today, no one is executed for Sabbath breaking. But God has already shown us His decreed penalty and exactly how He feels about the need to obey His laws. Indeed, the penalty for all sin is ultimately death (Romans 6:23).

Man is not to seek after the things of his own heart, or his own eyes, or the pride of life, because those things are of the world (verse 39; 1 John 2:16). Rather, we must forsake the spiritual harlotry of our old, sinful nature and set ourselves apart to follow only the true God (verses 40-41). We do need to use tassels today as memory devices to remember all of God’s laws, as God told the Israelites. Instead, God’s Spirit writes His laws on our hearts and minds (Hebrews 8:10), helping us to remember all of His commands (John 14:26).

The Dream of Empires (Daniel 1:18-2:49)

Daniel 1:18 brings us to the end of the Babylonian court training period for Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (a.k.a. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego). But there appears to be a chronological discrepancy with chapter 2. Chapter 1 says that the boys were to be trained for three years after their capture by Nebuchadnezzar (verse 5). Yet chapter 2 says that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream occurred in the

second year of his reign, and verse 13 implies that the training was finished since Daniel is considered to be one of the “wise men.” How do we resolve this?

In its note on the second year of the king in Daniel 2:1, *The New Bible Commentary* states: “This phrase is thought by some to conflict with the three-year period of training mentioned in ch. 1. But the phrase ‘three years’ (1:5) need refer only to portions of years.” What this would really mean is that the training was for a time period spanning three calendar years and not three full years. The short time prior to Nebuchadnezzar’s first year on the throne would have been year one. The first year of Nebuchadnezzar would have been year two. And the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign would have been year three. It was during this year—in 603 B.C.—that the training period ended.

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s *Commentary* points out: “The very difficulty [in chronology here] is a proof of genuineness; all was clear to the writer and the original readers from their knowledge of the circumstances, and so he adds no explanation. A forger would not introduce difficulties; the author did not then see any difficulty in the case” (note on 2:1).

Remarkably, Daniel and his friends proved far wiser than not only the other students, but than all the wise men of the realm (1:20). Besides the fact that God surely aided their intellectual development, we should consider that these young godly men of Judah’s court were surely well studied in Scripture, including the brilliance of the civil law system God gave through Moses as well as the unparalleled wisdom of the book of Proverbs.

In verse 21, we are told that Daniel continued in the service of the Babylonian court until Cyrus of Persia conquered the empire in 539 B.C., 66 years later.

Sometime later in Nebuchadnezzar’s second year, he has his famous dream, the subject of chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar was immensely troubled by this vivid dream. He knew it meant something and he felt he had to know what. Perhaps he saw it as a “message from the gods.” When he mentions the dream to his spiritual advisers, they respond in Aramaic (verse 4). Starting with their response and continuing to the end of chapter 7, the original language of the book of Daniel is Aramaic, the common language of the empire. Perhaps Daniel intended a broad gentile readership for this section.

The advisers asked that the king tell them his dream. But to be sure that whoever interpreted the dream was telling the truth, he required that they first tell him what he had dreamt. Any good storyteller could make up an “interpretation” (and perhaps the suspicious Nebuchadnezzar suspected his “wise men” often did just that!), whereas only one with supernatural knowledge could reveal the dream itself. Nebuchadnezzar let his fear turn to hostility and, ever the absolute ruler of his kingdom, goes “over the top” with his very real threats to kill all the “wise” men. Like too many rulers who have absolute power, it seems he was extremely ill-tempered with no care for human life. People were replaceable, even innocent young men who were not even involved in his problem. Among those threatened were Daniel and his three friends—but all of this was ultimately from God for a purpose.

How do we react when others make bad decisions that affect us? Daniel’s reaction carries an important lesson for every Christian. We all face bad decisions on the part of others—at work, at home, from the government and even at times in the Church. And this was a bad decision. Daniel’s very head was on the line. But he didn’t just stand around and complain about the government. Instead he took action—but it was tempered with tact and wisdom (verses 14-16; compare James 1:5). The word translated “wisdom” in verse 14 is related to the Hebrew word meaning “to taste.” In English we talk about a person having “good taste,” meaning having a sense of appropriateness. Daniel’s “good taste” was spiritual in nature. He had the wisdom (good taste) to know what was appropriate when approaching the rulers of the land. But he took no personal pride in his wisdom. He knew it came from God (Daniel 2:18).

However, to Daniel, just realizing God’s help was not enough. When God answered his need, his next reaction was to go back to God and offer thanks and praise (verses 19-23). Author Sinclair Ferguson correctly remarks on Daniel’s example: “We need men and women with that spirit today. We do not need more pomp or noise or triumphalism. In the last analysis, we do not need money in order to establish a witness to God in the highest reaches of our society. We need Christians of complete integrity who know that God’s eye is on them. With that we need people who pray. Perhaps more than anything else we need Daniel’s spirit of prayer” (*Mastering the Old Testament*, 1988, Vol. 19, p. 59).

With the answer in hand, Daniel goes to the king and reveals the dream and its meaning. The image the king saw may have been frightening, but it had great significance, foretelling a succession of great empires. Even in the first century, the identities of the four gentile kingdoms mentioned were understood, as we can see from the writings of Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 10, sec. 4). The head of gold, as Daniel explained, was the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar. The silver chest with two arms signified the empire of the Medes and Persians, which conquered and supplanted Babylon. The belly and thighs of bronze represented the Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, which swallowed up Persia. After Alexander's death, this Hellenistic empire continued in a divided form until its divisions were taken over by the next great kingdom, the Roman Empire, represented by the legs of iron. (The two legs apparently signified the east-west division that characterized the Late Roman Empire). Each succeeding metal is less valuable—perhaps showing the wealth of each succeeding empire being more thinly spread, as each empire was bigger than the previous. But, though less valuable, each succeeding metal is stronger, as each empire was more powerful than the last.

However, extending from the legs are feet and toes of iron mixed with clay—a brittle and unstable mixture because it would not bond well. These are destroyed by a stone from heaven, which reduces the entire image to dust. This stone clearly represents the Messiah, Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:4; Psalm 18:2; Matthew 16:18; Romans 9:33; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-8), coming from heaven to smash the governments of this world. The stone then grows into a great mountain that fills the whole earth. As a mountain in Bible prophecy is often symbolic of a kingdom, this signifies the Messiah's Kingdom extending to fill the entire earth after destroying the succession of great empires. And indeed, that is what we see in Daniel's explanation in Daniel 2:44. This fact is important to understand, for it shows that the Kingdom of God is a literal kingdom to be set up on earth—the fifth and final kingdom in succession—and not some ethereal sentiment set up in men's hearts, as many believe the Kingdom of God to be.

While most biblical scholars agree that the stone from heaven refers to the Messiah coming to set up His Kingdom, there are differing views about when it occurs. Some claim that “these kings” mentioned in verse 44 refers to the four preceding kingdoms with the stone representing Jesus Christ's first coming during the days of the first-century Roman Empire. Others view the toes as representing 10 nations extant at the end time in a loose federation (the brittle mixture) as a final resurrection of the Roman Empire (compare Revelation 17:12-14). The latter is the correct meaning. The Roman Empire has continued intermittently throughout history since its official fall in A.D. 476. The darkest and most ominous revival will exist on the world scene at the time of Christ's return.

To understand, we have to look at all the prophecies concerning the succession of empires and the Kingdom of God, especially those in the book of Revelation. Part of the key is given in Daniel 2:35, which states regarding the kingdoms that “the wind swept them away without leaving a trace” (NIV), something that did not happen to the Roman Empire while Jesus was on earth—nor has it ever really happened. In addition, the description in Revelation makes it very clear that the Kingdom of God is not here yet, but will commence at the return of Jesus Christ. To learn more about this, request or download our free booklets *The Book of Revelation Unveiled* and *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

Writing to a Roman audience, Josephus explained the succession of gentile empires. But it is interesting to see what he said to the Romans regarding the stone from heaven. Notice: “Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king; but I do not think proper to relate it, since I have only undertaken to describe things past or present, but not things that are future; yet if anyone be so very desirous of knowing truth, as not to wave such points of curiosity, and cannot curb his inclination for understanding the uncertainties of futurity, and whether they will happen or not, let him be diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings.” In the same space, Josephus could certainly have explained what the stone was, but it is clear that he did not want to provoke the Romans by telling them their empire would eventually be smashed by God.

Daniel 2 ends with another glimpse of Daniel's magnificent character wherein he shows his loyalty to his friends and petitions the king for special favor for them. As will happen numerous times during his long sojourn in Babylon, God rewards Daniel's character and loyalty with wealth and position.

Into the Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3)

Some historians believe that the language used in this chapter shows that the story occurred many years after the incidents in chapter 2. While this part of the book was written in Aramaic (the international language in use throughout the Neo-Babylonian Empire), the terms used for the various office bearers were Persian, not Babylonian, indicating that Daniel wrote the story many years later, after Babylon's fall to Persia, using Persian equivalents for the various officers to make them understandable to the Jewish readers of that time. We must remember that the early part of the book of Daniel is not a contiguous narrative, but a collection of independent accounts from the life of Daniel. Chapter 3 contains one of these separate accounts.

It seems that Nebuchadnezzar didn't really get the point from Daniel's interpretation of his dream that there is only one true God. As this chapter opens, the king decides to build a huge idolatrous image or statue. There's no indication that the image was of the king himself. It may have been a representation of his patron god Nebo, or Nabu. The people's "prostration before Nebo would amount to a pledge of allegiance to his viceroy, Nabu-kudurri-usur, i.e., Nebuchadnezzar" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, note on verse 1).

The construction was quite large, measuring sixty cubits high and six cubits across. "A cubit in Israel was approximately 18 inches; in Babylon it was about 20 inches. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar's image was 90 to 100 feet tall. The 10:1 ratio of height to width, however, suggests that the image was standing on a high pedestal so that the proportions of the figure itself would be closer to the normal ratio of about 4:1" (Nelson Study Bible, note on verse 1). That would mean it was perhaps a 40-foot-high statue on a 60-foot-high pedestal—still mammoth and imposing. Alternatively, some have seen the dimensions as suggestive of an obelisk or some other phallic image. Whatever the case, the construction was lavished with wealth, being made of gold, or at least overlaid with gold (the latter seeming more likely, given its great size).

The nature of the image is not relevant to the main focus of the story. If it had been important the account would have been more specific. Whatever the image, most Babylonians were expected to bow down and worship it, including all the Jewish exiles. Just how many Jews refused to worship it is not known since the Bible only records the story of Daniel's three friends. But it seems logical to assume that this was just what the locals were waiting for—a chance to get rid of their Jewish overlords. After all, the Jews were the captives. They were supposed to be beneath the Chaldeans, not in positions over them. Whatever the reason for singling out these three, it was to become a major lesson once again for Nebuchadnezzar and, no doubt, the rest of the Jews in Babylon.

Many have wondered why Daniel wasn't accused with his three friends. The Expositor's Bible Commentary lists six possible reasons:

- "1. Since Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter, he may have been absent from Babylon at the time, perhaps on government business in some other part of the kingdom.
- "2. He may have been closeted with other members of the king's cabinet, working on legalistic or military plans.
- "3. He may have been...too ill to attend the public ceremony; we know from 8:27 that sickness occasionally interfered with his carrying on with government business (cf. also 7:28; 10:8).
- "4. It may simply have been assumed that as the king's vizier (prime minister, for his responsibilities amounted to that status; cf. 2:48), he was not required to make public demonstration of his loyalty by worshipping the image of his god. After all, there is no indication that Nebuchadnezzar himself bowed down to the image. It may have been that he simply sat on his royal dais surveying the scene, with his closest friends and advisers at his side.
- "5. It is true that Daniel's office as ruler over the capital province of Babylon (2:48) was not specifically listed in the seven categories of public officials (cf. 3:3, though, of course, the rulers of subordinate provinces were required to be on hand); and none of the "wise men" (hakkimayya), over whom Daniel had been made chief, were included in the call for this public ceremony. As a type of accredited clergy serving under the state, they may have been exempted from this act of allegiance; their religious commitment would be presumed to be beyond question. In other words, Daniel did not belong to any of the special groups of jurists, advisors, financial experts, or political leaders included in the terms of the call.
- "6. Perhaps Daniel's reputation as a diviner was so formidable that even the jealous Chaldeans did not dare attack him before the king" (note on verses 16-18).

Here we also have another proof of genuineness: “[Commentator] Ford...makes the following observation: ‘Had the story been the invention that many have suggested; had it originated in the days of the Maccabees to nerve the faithful against Gentile oppression, it is unlikely that the chief hero would have been omitted. Reality transcends fiction, and the very “incompleteness” of this account testifies to its fidelity.’ It is hard to see how the force of this deduction can be successfully evaded. There is no psychological reason for an idealizing romancer to leave Daniel out of this exciting episode. The only way to account for this omission is that in point of fact he was not personally in attendance at this important function” (same note).

Returning to the story, consider the enormity of the spectacle. A towering golden statue looms over the pageantry as a magnificent orchestra starts playing, giving the signal for the worship to commence. The music is powerful enough to signal worship to everyone in Babylon. (Incidentally, leading the orchestra are the six most common instruments of the day as well as “all kinds of music.”)

Daniel’s three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah-referred to by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego-are ready to die for their beliefs. There is no way they will bow down to the image.

Now Judah’s enemies in Babylon get their chance. They report the disobedience to the king and he takes immediate action, summoning them to appear before him and explain their disobedience to his edict.

They demonstrate what the apostles were to teach many years later: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). They tell the king that their God is able to deliver them from harm, but even if He chooses not to, they were willing to die rather than disobey God by worshiping the image. Job had made a similar statement many years before: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). Like the apostle Paul’s sufferings many years later, their example of faith will be a marvelous lesson to all mankind (compare 2 Corinthians 4:2, 12; Hebrews 11:35-37).

“These courageous young men were willing to give their lives, if necessary, to show loyalty to God alone. Appreciating their devotion, God spared their lives in a powerful and miraculous witness to King Nebuchadnezzar (verses 19-30). The faith and faithfulness of these young men remains an enduring example of respect for God. Their example should inspire all of us to honor our Creator with a similar sense of loyalty and dedication” (Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?, p. 22).

“These three young men put their lives on the line when they chose not to bow before King Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image.... They did not know whether God would intervene to save their lives or not. They knew God could, but they didn’t know that He would. Regardless of the outcome, their living faith convicted them to put God first-a principle Jesus emphasized during His earthly ministry (Matthew 6:33).... Godly belief inevitably leads to doing. This is why we read in James that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). Living faith comes by doing what God says is good and right and being willing to accept whatever results may come from our actions. The examples and testimonies of the men and women we read about in Hebrews 11 show us we can believe God. He does not lie (Titus 1:2), and, as our loving, faithful Father, He delights in providing for us. ‘Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning....’ (James 1:17-18)” (You Can Have Living Faith, pp. 18-20).

The Jews’ open defiance of Nebuchadnezzar only makes his anger worse, and he gives what seem to be absurd orders concerning their execution. Given that the furnace would have been designed for smelting, it would have already been hot enough to consume the men, but he orders additional bellows under it to make it seven times hotter than usual. To make sure that they will be engulfed in flame and won’t escape, he leaves them fully clothed even with their hats on and then binds them before having them thrown into the furnace. The furnace is so hot that even the men who threw them in were killed.

“Apparently there was no door or screen to hide the inside of the furnace from view. Judging from bas-reliefs, it would seem that Mesopotamian smelting furnaces tended to be like an old-fashioned glass milk-bottle in shape, with a large opening for the insertion of the ore to be smelted and a smaller aperture at ground level for the admission of wood and charcoal to furnish the heat. There must have been two or more smaller holes at this same level to permit the insertion of pipes connected with large bellows, when it was desired to raise the temperature beyond what the flue or chimney would produce. Undoubtedly the furnace itself was fashioned of very thick adobe, resistant to intense heat. The large upper door was probably raised above the level of the fire

bed so that the metal smelted from the ore would spill on the ground in case the crucibles were upset. So the text says (v. 23) that the three 'fell down' (nepalu) into the fire. Apart from the swirling flames and smoke, then, they were quite visible to an outside observer, though, like the king, he would have to stand at a distance" (Expositor's, note on verses 19-23).

Nebuchadnezzar (and no doubt all those with him) are astonished. Not only do they see the three walking around inside the furnace, no longer tied up, but with them is a fourth person whom Nebuchadnezzar says is like a son of gods. The New King James Version translates this as "the Son of God," but this is misleading because it is the king who says this and he doesn't know anything about the real Son of God. The Babylonians believed in multiple gods, and the language of the original Aramaic literally means "like a son of gods." The Bible doesn't tell us what he really saw. It may have been an angel, it may have been the preincarnate Christ or it may have been a divinely created apparition. Whatever Nebuchadnezzar saw, it must not have appeared as a mere ordinary person for him to think it god-like. When the three men come out, this fourth does not have apparently disappeared.

Once again the king is stopped in his tracks. But although he knows that the Jews have a very powerful God, he still doesn't recognize that the God of the Jews is the only God (verses 28-29). That lesson is still to come. At this point, God is the God of the Jews, not the God of Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar is highly impressed and wants to honor their God, while at the same time emphasizing his own authority by issuing another extreme decree (verse 29). And the three Jews are promoted, obviously to the chagrin of their enemies (verse 30). Thus we see God's ironic and poetic justice.

The three men, literally thrown into a refiner's fire, could well have quoted the words of King David, which he meant only figuratively: "For you, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined; You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs; You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but you brought us out to rich fulfillment" (Psalms 66:10-12).

Romans chapter 4

Paul continues on with his teaching of equality in the Faith between Torah obedience and following a good conscience, between circumcision and uncircumcision, between Jew and Gentile. He brings up Abraham, and how we are never told and we never read that our father Abraham was never justified by works. This proclamation is never made in Scripture. Abraham believed Elohim and it was reckoned to him for righteousness "because" that belief drove him to action as well.

Those who believe to obtain their reward by their working for it, by reason, see the reward as something that can be paid for... like a debt that is owed. The problem is that the debt cannot be paid, it is unpayable for all men have sinned and the wages of sin is death. Therefore, the reward cannot be paid for by mankind. Now the person who believes that the Master has declared men to be right – and that to include the wicked – truly this is faith, and is counted as righteousness.

Abraham was declared righteous prior to the act of circumcision and the promise was given before the sign of the circumcision. And Abraham believed Elohim far beyond the physical because he and Sarah were past child bearing age. But Abraham believed Elohim and that he would do all that He spoke of and Abraham acted accordingly to that Faith. This faith was his righteousness.

Romans Chapter 5

Being declared right by Faith is exceeding joy and good news, in that it provides a way to peace and access to Yeshua and expectation of glory (eternal life). These expectations cause us to count all things as joy, even the persecutions, hardships, pressures of life, etc. In His love, He has given us the Spirit for help and joy through all of life's trials. Such great love and demonstration of love that all this – His death and resurrection – occurred for sinners! He was beat, spit on, and died for wicked people, evil men and women, and for a fallen world which proves His love all the more.

So now, if He went through all of that for wicked persons, how much more now for those who have now been declared right and not wicked? How much more now shall there be in and for deliverance? And just as the

trespass of Adam brought sin and death into the world, the righteous and obedient act of One brings righteousness into the world.