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Faith Integration and Leadership: The Legacy of Daniel in Socio-Political Administration of Ancient Near East

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the active participation of Daniel in socio-political administration in the Ancient Near East. His involvement *inter alia* demonstrates the beauty and blessing of the discreet interplay of faith and governance. Daniel's faith in God's sovereignty comes to stardom when instead of breathing political apathy as a captive that threatens not only the peace but also the lives of rulers and the ruled in the Ancient Near East. The paper focuses on the legacy of Daniel in the socio-political terrain and how the chronicle reinforces the importance of integrity, simplicity, and prudence as factors of good governance in any polity. Daniel's political participation therefore demystifies political apathy to reinforce the conviction for a reconstruction of the integration of faith and leadership in society. The narrative of Daniel throws light on God's interest in the growth of nations. Hence, Daniel's excellent performance in the administration of Babylon and Medo-Persia settles the puzzle of whether a man could maintain a societal leadership mandate and still serve God faithfully.

Introduction

The stunning legacy of Daniel in power and politics in Babylon due to his active participation in the governance of Babylon remains quintessential of a productive interface of faith and politics. Daniel as one of the Jewish captives was forced to live in Babylon where the monarchical system of government was being practiced. This method of governance made Babylonian kings' rule with absolute power. Their influence and domineering nature made Babylonian monarchs to be worshipped as gods (Encyclopedia.com 2023). Their acclaimed intimacy with divinities caused Babylonian rulers to be arbiters in social-political matters. For instance, King Nebuchadnezzar ruled as royal imperial majesty, he summoned his governors for the inauguration of new worship (Dan 3:2). In the same vein, his son, King Belshazzar lavishly expended the nation's wealth frivolously (Dan 5:1). King Darius in what appears to be economic reform seeks prudent aides "that the king might not suffer loss" (Dan 6:2). It is in this kind of political climate that Daniel was providentially privileged to serve as the foremost principal officer of Babylon.

However, the inclusion of Daniel in the state affairs of Babylon left more to be desired and stirred riddles among which are; How did Daniel—a slave—become a supervisor? How did he cling to the position of leadership in Babylon? Could a man faithfully and acceptably serve God and also participate actively in power and politics? Did Daniel's faith in God make a significant impact in serving asking aid in a foreign land?

Theoretical Framework

The research framework is premised on the research of Baxter's philosophy of the intricate union of religion and politics based on a triad; the divine constitution of the world, social "creatureliness" of man and conscience (Baxter, 1673 (4), 104). Baxter's work is an improvement on the work of seventeenth-century Protestant England's concept of the world as a divinely constituted, guided by law, and conscience. According to Baxter (1673) "the political government was necessarily rooted in the divine constitution of the world" (Ibid. 1673, 4, 116.) Thus, Baxter aptly sets the foundation of his political philosophy by affirming that all laws emanate from and serves God's purpose. As a social being in an orderly universe, allegiance to divine and government regulation aligns with man's nature. Thus, it was expedient for Daniel to obey and operate in the ancient Near East where rulers governed and enforced law and order.

Judah in Captivity in Babylon

Daniel was from one of the noble families of Judah. Daniel and the other three noble youths were carried off to Babylon, along with some of the vessels of the temple" (Easton, 1988, 966). Thus, the book of Daniel starts with the narration of how King Nebuchadnezzar overran Judah and took her hostage; "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand."

The above text is a major maker in the book that reveals that the subjugation of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar was therefore not by his military might but evidence of God's involvement in the affairs of men. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege against Jerusalem and held the hostage (Henry, 2008). Among the children of Judah who were taken to captivity in Babylon were devout worshipers of the Lord, "men who were as true as steel to principle, who would not be corrupted by selfishness, but who would honor God at the loss of all things" (White, 1917, p.481). Among those who preserved their loyalty to God were Daniel and his three friends—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. (Ibid). Daniel and his friends perseveringly learned what it means to be displaced and unsettled; nevertheless, they preserved their faith amidst life's challenges (Stefanovic, 2007, 71).

Preparatory Class in Royal College

Nebuchadnezzar's knack for knowledge, proficiency, and character made him establish what could be described in modern terms as Royal College and made himself responsible for the funding, "And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat" (Dan 1:5). The college's curricula cover three years and admission into the school is based on merit as stated in Daniel 1:3-7

And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and the princes; Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans....Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and Mishael, of Meshach; and Azariah, of Abednego. (Dan 1:3-7)

The providential admission of Daniel and his friends (Dan 1:3-7) presents both opportunity and difficulty. Opportunity in the sense that they are given temporal relief, a breathing space that in this

dispensation would be referred to as "study leave." The training years become a challenge as they would have to choose between their normal diet (which is simple, nutritional, and invigorating) and the king's delicacies.

Healthy Food, Healthy Mind, and Excellent Grade

Daniel and his friends seem to be well aware of the effect of the king's meat and wine which makes them make an informed decision to reject whatsoever could cause defilement, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore, he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (Dan 1:8) The decision is well thought out as the text reveals the matter comes from his לֵב "heart," which in Hebrew thinking involves decision-based on knowledge, reflection, resolution, and determination not pollute or desecrate one of their greatest valued assets—God-given bodies. Although the text does not identify what this pollution might mean. This gap has made scholars suggest various reasons that would have made pious Jews avoid royal food: (1) the Babylonians like other pagan nations consumed unclean meats; (2) the animals had not been properly processed according to Leviticus stipulation (Lev 17:14, 15); (3) possibility of offering the part of the meat (first) to god as a sacrifice (Acts 15:26); (4) the use of expensive and unhealthful food that is contrary to the temperance principle; (5) the preference of Daniel to avoid fleshy food. It may be best to see their resolve as having the correct perception of their bodies as temples of God (1 Corinth 6:19-20) and thereby strongly determine to avoid anything that will pollute or undermine their mental, physical, and spiritual development or hinder optimal and excellent performance (Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 1980 (4) 760).

The apt and ingenuity of Daniel and his friends to spot a better and reliable alternative speak volumes of their discretion to see healthy food in Babylon where their nutritious values lie unexplored or given due attention. At the protest of the prince of the eunuchs of having his job and life endangered if he fails in keeping the selected students in good physique, he says, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king" (Dan 1:10). Daniel humbly but firmly assured him of nutritional value in wholesome plant-based food which undoubtedly, he has tested and tried. The conviction of Daniel makes him appeal and reassure the prince of the eunuchs with this ingenious insight, "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." (Dan. 1:12-14). Interestingly, Daniel from the onset puts his faith into practice, integrating his faith in regards to what he eats and drinks. Writing on the importance of diet, Makinde calls mankind to what she terms "food for thought in thought for food" (Makinde, 2015). Paul also wants his readers to pay attention to what they eat and how they eat when he writes, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

Daniel's integration of faith into what would ordinarily be termed a common thing of life shows his sensitivity and reawakening of ethical consciousness in a foreign land. The appraisal of the wellness of students in Royal College shows that the choice of Daniel is not misplaced: "At the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies." (Dan 1:15). Daniel's choice invariably contributes immensely to the education in the land especially in regards to diet and health. The emergent studies in nutrition and dietetics have revalidated the interface of diet and brain health. Research by the Mayo Clinic (2023) a top-ranking hospital in the United States made a profound statement,

Research suggests that the ability to maximize memory function may be related to what you eat. Following an eating plan that provides a healthier selection of dietary fats and a variety of plant foods rich in phytonutrients could positively affect your health. Phytonutrients are substances found in certain plants that are believed to be beneficial for human health and help prevent certain diseases.... Studies are finding that what's good for your heart also may be good for your brain. So, the best bet for rich memories is to forgo unhealthy fat and remember to diversify your plant-based food portfolio.... Diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, fish, healthier fats, and herbs or seeds boost the brain's memory functioning.

The legacy of Daniel in preparatory class regarding diet and brain health has spurred faith-based institutions to consider that "diets rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, fish, healthier fats, and herbs or seeds boost the brain's memory functioning" (Bertrands, 2023). Commenting on the diet that affords vigor of intellect, White posits that grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for man by His Creator. These foods prepared in as simple and natural a manner as possible, are the most healthful and nourishing. They impart strength, power of endurance, and vigor of intellect, that is not afforded by a more complex and stimulating diet (White, 1938, 310). The healthy faith of the Hebrew boys impacts their mental health and excellent performance. They honour God with their lives by keeping them from pollution and God also honours them by giving them superlative knowledge that makes them not only outstanding but also ranked overall best thereby confirming the veracity of God's promise in Deuteronomy 28:1, 13

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them (Deut 28:1, 13).

The outcome of the examination conducted by the king himself shows the superiority of the Hebrew boys to all other participants. "And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in his entire realm." (Dan 1:17-20). The diligence of the God-fearing Hebrew men made them to be enlisted into the service of the king as aides. Solomon would later write on the man who diligently discharged his duties, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov 22:29). Daniel and his friends are ten times better and rewarded accordingly, the maxim is thus apt that knowledge is power as it is the ordained platform that Daniel rode from slavery to palace. Education, therefore becomes a leveler that silently and efficiently removes the gap between the native-born and foreigners. The legacy of "Daniel and his companions have been recorded on the pages of the inspired word for the benefit of the youth of all succeeding ages. What men have done, men may do" (White, 1938, 310).

Faith Averts Fatal Verdict

King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that destabilizes him. His search for the meaning of the dream reveals the vulnerability and the inefficiency of his wise men; the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans (Dan 2:2) for none could tell him his dream and its interpretation (Dan 2:2-3). The tyrant king—Nebuchadnezzar, in rage, gives order "to destroy all the wise men of Babylon." The genocide begins in earnest "they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel

and his companions, to kill them" (Dan 2:12-13). Many lives, gifts, and human resources are set for extermination but for the faith that Daniel has in God to reveal the secret, which came to the rescue. Daniel with wise counsel halts the killing, asks for time, and calls his friends to offer prayers of faith to God who can save. "The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results" (James 5:16 NLT). Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation are revealed to Daniel and his companion by divine insight. He relays it to the king and a stupendous and imminent crisis is halted. Thanks to the faith of the Hebrew boys who stand as light and salt of the earth. What would have been a different story if Daniel had not been actively involved in socio-political activities in Babylon? Daniel intimated to King Nebuchadnezzar of the power succession till the close of earth history. The unraveling of the mystery surrounding the interpretation of the king's dream brings a turning point to the state and status of Daniel and his team as their reward and elevation change their lots from captives to captains and from slaves to supervisors. The text reads, "Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon." Daniel recognizes the input of his friends; he uses his influence to enlist them in "the affairs of the province of Babylon" (Daniel 2:49). It is on note that the greater achievement of Daniel is the spread of the knowledge of God among the heathens. Incredibly, King Nebuchadnezzar prostrates before Daniel saying "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret" (Dan 2:46-47). As a royal priesthood and a holy nation, Daniel proclaims the praises of the sovereign God in a foreign nation (1Pet 2:9).

The service of Daniel spans more than one empire with positive impacts. He serves as a consultant to Belshazzar or what could be termed a special adviser. (Dan 5:1). In the quest of King Darius, the ruler of the kingdom Medes for good governance and accountability, Daniel is the preferred candidate as the king knows that the inclusion of Daniel in his administration would make him "suffer no loss" (Dan 6:1-2). Isaiah's prophecy perfectly depicts the life and service of Daniel,

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD
is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
and deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you,
And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to
your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising (Isa 60:1-3)

It is not an understatement that to Daniel, serving God is synonymous with serving humanity. He lives as 'light and salt' at the Royal College. He is a man of prayer who brings his faith to bear on and quench national crisis. His life of simplicity and accountability makes him thrive well in the corridor of power. More than anything else, he is known as a man "in whom is the spirit of the holy God" (Dan 4:8), and "an excellent spirit was in him" (Dan 6:2). The Queen in the days of Belshazzar's perplexity reports about Daniel, "There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods" (Dan 5:11). Darius the Mede perceives "an excellent spirit in Daniel." The Babylonians might not be aware of the knowledge of the Holy Spirit but they could not gainsay that Daniel by his words, walks, and selfless services has a different spirit that is traceable to a supreme deity. The presence of the spirit of God in Daniel makes all the difference in his participation in power in Babylon. White ingeniously posits, "There is no limit to the usefulness of the one who, putting self aside, makes room for the working of the Holy Spirit upon his heart, and lives a life wholly consecrated to God" (White, 1925, 254). Daniel has left an important legacy for Christians today who may want to be involved in governance with integrity. This truth is ingeniously described by White (1903) when she writes,

The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature--the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man. White. E. G. (1903), 57.

Faith and Politics for Good Governance

The concept of faith is a desirable value system found in society. It is a platform where beliefs and deep convictions reflect the acts of individuals in society. This act of faith system is also embedded in the religion practiced by individuals in the society. Therefore, religion and politics though different are interdependent sub-systems of society. Although, as stated above faith-based practices (religion) and politics might be different, the relationship between the two is characterized by interdependence. Peter Berger (1967, 1999) defines religion as a "set of beliefs that connects the individual to a community, and in turn to a sense of being or purpose that transcends the individual and the mundane" (Berger, 1967, 1999).

The concept dominates the regulative power to make collectively binding decisions, allocate resources, and solve social problems for the collective good of the society. Harold Laswell sums up politics to mean "who gets what, when, and how" (Laswell, 1936). It can then be said that the allocation of the scarce resources available in the polity of a nation is a play of power and the influence and the influential. Therefore, if good governance is to be attained, those who are seeking power or who hold power of authority must be individuals typified of the kind of faith value system depicted in Daniel.

This paper is of the view that when the value-based system of faith as typified in Daniel's culture is intertwined in politics, power, and authority become a product that promotes good governance for the good life of the people. The model of Daniel's value in governance shows us that for good governance to be achieved, the act of accountability, good advice, selfless service, political will, and integrity are highly important. Hence, the skills, this paper wants to establish, must permeate the political arena of our contemporary environment. Countries that desire good governance are looking for men who are honest and true to duty, who will stand for the truth and act without fear though the heaven falls (Ellen White, Ed 57.3), until then can we have the kind of haven that the polity of our community desire. Hence, in today's society, men of Faith are ready to integrate their faith-based values into the socio-political terrain rather than demonstrating apathy to governance.

The need for godly people is imperative because if the resources available are scarce, the distribution of such calls for prudence, accountability, integrity, fairness, and justice where equity can be attained as exemplified in the life of Daniel while in ruling power in Babylon. However, if such distribution is left in the hands of people without integrity and they control the circle of power and influence, the aftermath result would be detrimental to the populace. It is in this stead that godly men with Daniel's perspective of authority and the dispensing of resources are needed for all kinds of political terrain.

Before the ascension of Daniel in the political sphere of the Babylonian, it was observed that politically, the kingdom had no concern for its people, but for its selfish gain and satisfaction. In his article for Britannica, Augustyn states, "He (Nebuchadnezzar) also revitalized Babylon, constructing the wondrous hanging gardens and rebuilding the Temple of Marduk and its

accompanying ziggurat." (Augustyn, 2020). This warrants an oppressive work system that is not focused on liberating the people of Babylon, but on enslaving people. Such enslavement denies the people a good life and a way of just living until Daniel comes into the picture and changes the narratives. Daniel's devotion to God. Daniel's way of life and service to humanity are virtues worthy of emulation in this present dispensation.

Contributions/Recommendations

This study has highlighted the outstanding legacy of Daniel in the socio-political Administration of Babylon through Persia which stems from his belief in and loyalty to God as superior to all other obligations. Daniel's patriotism, integrity, lifestyle, Spirit-filled and prayer life, and team spirit, are models for imitation by Christians who are privileged to be in the corridor of power and governance.

1. This study has allayed the fear of many God-fearing individuals may not perform creditably in political appointments. If only they would follow Daniel's steps that made his services, duties as devotion to God, and work as part of worship. This is well articulated in the New Testament injunction, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col 3:23 NIV c.f. 1 Corinth 10:31).
2. Christians in any walk of life will do well if they seek the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who guides, empowers, and guarantees man's competence and character as exemplified in the life of Daniel who was described as man "in who is the spirit of holy God." (Dan 4:11, Zach 4:6 Emphasis supplied). Where is the emphasis?
3. A man ought to put his heart into giving the best in all undertakings. (Eccl 9:10).
4. God's followers should anticipate persecution as their faithfulness, integrity will expose the ineffectiveness of the wicked and therefore precipitate rage of affliction. God's intervention and promises remain the panoply of God's people in their time of need. (Ps 91, Job 5:12).
5. The role of prayer partners and teamwork are essential ingredients that aided Daniel's success. These are no less needed in this contemporary dispensation.
6. The sovereignty of God is a great blessing to all who believe in God as the possessor of heaven and earth. This makes every son of God thrive in every land just as Daniel through God's favour became "president" in a foreign land.

The experiences seen in most developing nations are that of leadership problems who are not true to their calling and who enslave their citizens under economic hardship with no justice and equity. The narration if it must change calls for a paradigm shift in the way leaders are recruited which cements the thrust of this paper that men like Daniel with excellence spirit, servant leadership, and integrity. Leaders with the love of God at heart are needed in the political sphere of nations. This will not only bring good governance but also enhance the restoration of the image of God in man, a legacy that was dramatically demonstrated in the life of Daniel.

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