Activity Four: The Book of Daniel, Chapter 5

Introduction

The Book of Daniel is part of the Old Testament of the Bible. The Old Testament contains an awful lot of useful historical information because Judea was part of the Babylonian and then the Persian Empires. In fact, much earlier, thousands of Jews had been forcibly deported to Babylon; from that point onwards events in Babylon were part of Jewish culture, and so inevitably found their way into Jewish writing.

The Book of Daniel describes the activities of Daniel, supposedly one of the Jews exiled in Babylon. Purportedly written by Daniel himself, the Book actually can't have been written until the 160s BC, some 400 years later, but it could have used earlier written sources. Equally, much of the information could have been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, so the original source of the information could be much earlier and close to 539. Oral story-telling was common in a number of ancient cultures. Professional story-tellers, usually musicians, would travel from town to town regaling audiences with popular stories; the most famous examples of such stories are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Today, the notion of remembering incredibly intricate and detailed stories word for word seems very difficult and one naturally suspects that errors would have crept in, or that stories would have been exaggerated over time. That is true, of course, but stories such as the *Iliad* were structured in such a way as to make remembering details easier, so it was possible!

Although the Jews were affected by Cyrus' conquest of Babylon, they were not directly involved. Consequently, we can question the extent to which specific details would have been known within Jewish circles (although there were Jews living in Babylon at the time).

Text

The text can be found online; http://www.biblestudytools.com/daniel/5.html.

Starter Activity

Make a list of the pros and cons of this source. You should consider questions such as: 'how likely is this source to be reliable', 'what kind of information does this source reveal?' and 'what kind of information can I not get from this particular source'.

Think particularly about **who** wrote the source, **why** they produced it, and **how** it was composed.