

THE PRAYER OF NABONIDUS

4Q242 — Qumran Cave 4

Ancient Aramaic Fragment — Study Reading Edition

MANUSCRIPT

Four parchment fragments survive from Cave 4. The Israel Antiquities Authority classifies 4Q242 as a Hasmonean-period Aramaic manuscript. Paleographic estimates commonly place the surviving copy in the 1st century BC; the story it preserves may be older.

SURVIVING TEXT — VERY LITERAL STUDY READING

[The words of the pr]ayer which Nabonidus, king of [Ba]bylon, the [great] king, prayed
[. . .]
[. . .] with a severe affliction, by decree of the Most High God, in Tayma [. . .]
I was afflicted seven years [. . .]
and my sin He forgave. A diviner—he was a Jew from [among the exiles of Judah . . .]
[said:] “Declare and write, to give glory and greatness to the name of the Most High
God [. . .]”

[Then I wrote:] “When I was afflicted [. . .] in Tayma,
seven years I was praying to gods of silver and gold,
[bronze and iron,] wood, stone and clay,
because I thought that they were gods [. . .]”

FRAGMENT 4

[. . .] apart from them I recovered [. . .]
[. . .] because of Him. He restored [. . .]
[. . .] my companions; I was not able [. . .]
[. . .] how you resemble [. . .]

WHAT THIS FRAGMENT IS SAYING

The speaker identifies himself as Nabonidus, king of Babylon. He describes a long affliction at Tayma, says a Jewish diviner instructed him, and contrasts the Most High God with manufactured gods of metal, wood, stone and clay.

WHY THE DANIEL PARALLEL IS IMPORTANT

Daniel 4 tells a related story about Nebuchadnezzar: a Babylonian king is humbled for a period and ultimately acknowledges the Most High. 4Q242 names Nabonidus instead. The parallel is significant, but the surviving fragment by itself does not establish exactly how the two traditions are historically related.

SOURCE NOTE

Fresh study reading based on the surviving Aramaic evidence and openly available manuscript/translation resources. Missing text and restorations are intentionally visible rather than silently filled in.