

Book of Daniel Explained

Title:

The title of the book comes from the name of its chief character and author.

Daniel who through the book received revelations from God.

Daniel bridges the entire 70 years of the Babylonian captivity from (605 to 536 B.C.; compare 1:1 and 9:1-3).

Nine of the 12 chapters relate revelation through dreams and visions.

Daniel was God's mouthpiece to the Gentile and Jewish world, declaring God's current and future plans.

What Revelation is to the New Testament prophetically and apocalyptically, Daniel is to the Old Testament.

Author - Date:

Several verses indicate that the writer is Daniel (8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2, 7; 12:4-5), whose name means "God is my Judge."

He wrote in the autobiographical first person from (7:2 on), and is to be distinguished from the other 3 Daniels of the Old Testament (compare 1 Chron. 3:1; Ezra 8:2; Neh. 10:6).

As a teenager, possibly about 15 years old, Daniel was kidnapped from his noble family in Judah and deported to Babylon to be brainwashed into Babylonian culture for the task of assisting in dealing with the imported Jews.

There he spent the remainder of a long life (85 years or more).

He made the most of the exile successfully, exalting God by his character and service.

He quickly rose to the role of statesman by official royal appointment and served as a confidante of kings as well as a prophet in two world empires, i.e., the Babylonian (2:48), and the Medo-Persian (6:1-2).

Christ confirmed Daniel as the author of this book (compare Matt. 24:15).

Daniel lived beyond the time described (in Dan. 10:1; ca. 536 B.C.).

It seems most probable that he wrote the book shortly after this date but before (ca. 530 B.C.).

(Daniel 2:4b – 7:28), which prophetically describes the course of Gentile world history, was originally and appropriately written in Aramaic, the contemporary language of international business.

Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah were Daniel's prophetic contemporaries.

The authenticity of few books in the bible has been more furiously assailed by critics than the Book of Daniel.

The primary reasons for this is:

1. The book is said to make several historical blunders.
2. The language of the period.
3. The position of the book in the third part of the threefold division of the Old Testament Canon (laws and writings), shows that it was written too late to be placed in the collection of the Prophets.
4. The book contains many examples of historical events that occurred long after the time of the traditional date for Daniel.

The arguments for the book's authenticity however are quite convincing and answer well those negative doubts:

1. The charges of historical blunders have proved false in the past (e.g., the mention of Belshazzar, now firmly established by the discovery of the Nabonidus Chronicle, was once thought to be a mistake). Present problematic passages will eventually likewise be solved.
2. Not only do the international contacts of the Neo-Babylonian Empire account for the presence of foreign words, but recent linguistic research has rendered obsolete the argument concerning the supposed lateness of Daniel's language.
3. Daniel was a statesman as well as a prophet, and could thus easily be included in the writings.
4. Since God is the Sovereign of history, He can inspire men to record accurate predictions of events both near and far.
5. Jesus quoted Daniel as a prophet (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14).
6. Daniels contemporaries mention him as a person known for his righteousness and wisdom (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3).
7. Ancient authorities, both Jewish and Christian, accepted the book's authenticity.
8. Taken at face value, the book purports to be a document (of the sixth century B.C.), written by a prophet of God. There is no good reason to reject Daniel's authorship of the book.

If the claims of the book are taken at face value, it was written during the lifetime of Daniel at various periods between the time he was captured and the third year of Cyrus (605 to 536 B.C.), or simply (the sixth century B.C.).

The dates of the three kings mentioned in the book are well known: Nebuchadnezzar (605 - 562 B.C.), Belshazzar (553-539 B.C.), and Cyrus (559 - 529 B.C.).

Cyrus's reign over Babylon, the scene of the later chapters of Daniel (began in 539 B.C.).

Interpretation – Purpose:

The interpretation of the book can be determined only by understanding its historical background.

In 626 B.C., Nabopolassar of Babylon freed his city from Assyrian control and thus began the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

In 612 B.C., Babylonia and Media together defeated the Assyrians and destroyed Nineveh, their capital.

Nabopolassar was succeeded by his son Nebuchadnezzar (in 605 B.C.), shortly after the latter had defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish.

The Babylonians were then the undisputed masters of the ancient Near East.

In the first of three campaigns against Judah, Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel and his three friends, among others, captive to Babylon (605 B.C.).

Later campaigns resulted in the taking of 10,000 captives, including Ezekiel (597 B.C.) and finally, the destruction of the temple and city itself (586 B.C.).

Four successive Babylonian kings are not mentioned in Daniel: Amel-marduk (the Evil-merodach of the Bible; 562 - 560 B.C.), Nergalsharusur (the Nergal-sharezer (of Jer. 39:3), known to the Greeks as Neriglissar (560 - 556 B.C.), Labashi-marduk (556 B.C.); and Nabonidus (555 - 539 B.C.).

However, the final king of the Empire, Belshazzar (553-539 B.C.), is an important figure in Daniel's account.

Belshazzar, although a co-regent with his father Nabonidus, was in fact the reigning monarch for much of his father's term.

During Belshazzar's rule Daniel had the vision of the four beasts (chapter 7), and the vision of the ram and the male goat (in chapter 8).

The famous "handwriting on the wall" (in chapter 5) was a prediction of Belshazzar's fall, since the city was taken that night (Oct. 12, 539 B.C.) by Cyrus the Persian.

Cyrus is the only Persian king mentioned in the book.

Darius is clearly identified as a Mede and should not be confused with a later Persian king by the same name.

The writing of this book has several purposes:

1. It presents a divine philosophy of history. God is represented as the Sovereign over all of history. He moves men and nations according to His will (4:35).
2. It provides a prophetic framework for the future, that period called by Jesus as "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). The world empires mentioned (in chapters 2 and 7), show the ultimate fortunes of Gentile powers.
3. It explains other portions of Scripture. The Book of Revelation could not be understood apart from the Book of Daniel. (Revelation chapters 4-19), is a commentary on the events of Daniel's "seventieth week" (Daniel 9:27).
4. It served as a book of encouragement to the Babylonian exiles, whose hearts were no doubt lightened by Daniel's predictions of the ultimate triumph of Israel over her enemies.

Background – Setting:

The book begins (in 605 B.C.), when Babylon conquered Jerusalem and exiled Daniel, his 3 friends, and others.

It continues to the eventual demise of Babylonian supremacy (in 539 B.C.), when Medo-Persian besiegers conquered Babylon (5:30-31), and goes even beyond that to (536 B.C.; 10:1).

After Daniel was transported to Babylon, the Babylonian victors conquered Jerusalem in two further stages (597 B.C. and 586 B.C.).

In both takeovers, they deported more Jewish captives.

Daniel passionately remembered his home, particularly the temple at Jerusalem, almost 70 years after having been taken away from it (6:10).

Daniel's background is alluded to in part by Jeremiah, who names 3 of the last 5 kings in Judah before captivity (compare Jeremiah 1:1-3): Josiah (ca. 641 – 609 B.C.), Jehoiakim (ca. 609 -597 B.C.), and Zedekiah (597 – 586 B.C.).

Jehoahaz (ca. 609 B.C.), and Jehoiachin (ca. 598 – 597 B.C.) are not mentioned (compare Jeremiah Introduction: Background – Setting).

Daniel is also mentioned by Ezekiel (compare 14:14, 20; 28:3), as being righteous and wise.

He is alluded to by the writer of Hebrews as one of “the prophets ... who through by faith ... stopped the mouths of lions” (Heb. 11:32-33).

The long-continued sin of the Judeans without national repentance eventually led to God's judgment for which Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah had given fair warning.

Earlier, Isaiah and other faithful prophets of God had also trumpeted the danger.

When Assyrian power had ebbed by 625 B.C., the Neo-Babylonians conquered:

- (1) Assyria with its capital Nineveh (in 612 B.C.);
- (2) Egypt in the following years, and
- (3) Judah (in 605 B.C.), when they overthrew Jerusalem in the first of 3 steps (also 597 B.C. 586 B.C.).

Daniel was one of the first groups of deportees, and Ezekiel followed (in 597 B.C.).

Israel of the northern kingdom had earlier fallen to Assyria (in 722 B.C.).

With Judah's captivity, the judgment was complete.

In Babylon, Daniel received God's word concerning successive stages of Gentile world domination through the centuries until the greatest Conqueror, Messiah, would put down all Gentile lordship.

He then will defeat all foes and raise His covenant people to blessing in His glorious millennial kingdom.

Historical – Theological Themes:

Daniel was written to encourage the exiled Jews by revealing God's program for them, both during and after the time of Gentile power in the world.

Prominent above every other theme in the book is God's sovereign control over the affairs of all rulers and nations, and their final replacement with the True King.

The key verses are (2:20-22, 44; compare 2:28, 37; 4:34-35; 6:25-27).

God had not suffered defeat in allowing Israel's fall (Dan. Chapter 1), but was providentially working His sure purposes toward an eventual full display of His King, the exalted Christ.

He sovereignly allowed Gentiles to dominate Israel, i.e., Babylon (605-539 B.C.), Medo-Persia (539 – 331 B.C.), Greece (331 – 146 B.C.), Rome (146 B.C. – 476 A.D.), and all the way to the Second Advent of Christ.

These stages in Gentile power are set forth (in chapters 2 and 7).

This same theme also embraces Israel's experience both in defeat and finally in her kingdom blessing (in Chapters 8 through 12; compare 2:35, 45; 7:27).

A key aspect within the over-arching theme of God's kingly control is Messiah's coming to rule the world in glory over all men (2:35, 45; 7:13; 14, 27).

He is like a stone (in chapter 2), and like a son of man (in chapter 7).

In addition, He is the Anointed One (Messiah; in chapter 9:26).

Chapter 9 provides the chronological framework from Daniel's time to Christ's kingdom.

A second theme woven into the fabric of Daniel is the display of God's sovereign power through miracles.

Daniel's era is one of 6 in the Bible with a major focus on miracles by which God accomplished His purposes.

Other periods include:

- (1) The Creation and Flood (Gen. 1:11);
- (2) The patriarchs and Moses (Gen. 12 – Deuteronomy);
- (3) Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 13);
- (4) Jesus and the apostles (Gospels, Acts); and
- (5) The time of the Second Advent (Revelation).

God, who has everlasting dominion and ability to work according to His will (4:34-35), is capable of miracles, all of which would be lesser displays of power than was exhibited when He acted as Creator (in Gen. 1:1).

Daniel chronicles the God-enabled recounting and interpreting of dreams which God used to reveal His will (Chapters 2, 4, and 7).

Other miracles included:

- (1) His writing on the wall and Daniel's interpreting it (chapter 5);
- (2) His protection of the 3 men in a blazing furnace (chapter 3);

- (3) His provision of safety for Daniel in a lions' den (chapter 6); and
- (4) Supernatural prophecies (chapters 2, 7, 8; 9:24 – 12:13).