

Daniel

Summary

The book of Daniel is neatly divided into two distinctly different segments. Chapters one through six are a narrative from Daniel's early days in exile. Chapters seven through twelve are Daniel's prophecies for the end of time. In the first section of the book, the historical narrative depicts the life and challenges of the exiled Israelites, now captives in Babylon. Babylon rebelled against the Assyrian empire in 626 B.C. and took the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 B.C. After defeating the Egyptian armies in 605 B.C., Babylon became the dominant power in the Middle East. That same year of 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and conquered it militarily. Daniel was among those Jews taken captive to Babylon when Jerusalem fell. Although he was a captive from a young age, Daniel eventually transitioned from his Babylonian captive role to become a prophet, a government official, and a "wise man," maintaining these roles even after the Medes and Persians overran Babylon in 539 B.C. under Darius, the Mede.

Daniel's book contains a prophetic vision that is dazzling in its visual imagery. In the midst of these incredible visions of kings and kingdoms, battles and beasts, dreams and deceptions, there is a thread that powerfully weaves it all together: our God is sovereign and completely trustworthy, rising up and taking down rulers, empires, and the plans of men to fit His divine purposes for all of humanity. The reader should also take courage from Daniel's prophecy of one final Kingdom that will be ruled by God Himself. This final Kingdom will last forever and will be filled with those who have remained faithful to Him to the end.

Author

Daniel, the prophet who lived in the sixth century B.C., wrote the book. Daniel lived in Jerusalem through the Babylonian siege, survived the siege, but along with many of his countrymen, Daniel was carried away into captivity where he lived most of his life exiled in Babylon.

Date

Daniel begins in 530 B.C. shortly after Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, captured Babylon in 539 B.C.

Primary Characters

Daniel also called "Belteshazzar" (Daniel 1-12)

Shadrach also called "Hananiah" (Daniel 1-3)

Meshach also called "Mishael" (Daniel 1-3)

Abednego also called "Azariah" (Daniel 1-3)

Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II (Daniel 1-5)

Belshazzar, regent of Babylon and son of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4, 7-8)

Darius, King of the Medes (Daniel 5-6, 9-11)

Historical Moments

Life in Babylonian Exile (Daniel 1-9)

Daniel in the Den of Lions (Daniel 6)

Major Theological Themes

God Has a Plan - God is sovereign and trustworthy. He raises up kings, rulers, government officials, nations, and even individual people with special skills, all for His own divine purposes. This forms the major theological theme of Daniel.

Faith Becomes Real when It Is Tested and Acted Upon - God expects us not only to confess faith in Him but also to trust Him and exercise that faith. Daniel's book contains several remarkable narratives of God's people being put to tests of faith, even to the point of death, and remaining steadfastly obedient to God's commands, clinging faithfully to His saving provision. Do not miss the remarkable stories of faith worth dying for in Daniel, chapters two and six.

God Desires Perseverance - God's people are to remain steadfast, obedient, and trusting even though trials and tests will become more frequent and severe as the end of history approaches. God has a remarkable plan of redemption and restoration for all believers who endure such trials to the end.

Lessons Learned from Daniel

Faith Worth Standing For - Just as was the case in Daniel's time, our faith is worth standing on, even to the point of death if necessary. As history continues its steady march to the end, Daniel's prophecy (among others in the Bible) makes it clear that civil government will become more turbulent and uncertain and God's people will be faced with more frequent and severe persecution and temptation to abandon their faith. This is to be expected, but God has also made two very important promises:

- a. Christians *will not be tempted beyond what they can bear* (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- b. Those who believe in Jesus and faithfully endure to the end will be saved and live with God forever. You can see these promises in Matthew 24:13, John 3:16; 5:24, and Revelation 21 as well as many other places in the Bible.

Strong Faith in the Midst of Our Culture - It is possible to live a life of faith even when we are surrounded by distracting cultural influences and false propaganda. Daily, we read news stories of how modern culture is becoming increasingly estranged from Christian beliefs, traditions, and ways. Just like Daniel's captors urged him to assume their customs, our "captor," modern culture, shouts out for us to lead a life of self-centered pleasure as the ultimate path to true fulfillment. Like Daniel, we can resist this temptation and trust in God's Word, His commands, and His promises as the true source of fulfillment.

We Can Trust God - God has a grand plan for all of history. Because God is the God of all time and history, we do not need to worry about anything. Instead, we are to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the path of obedience just before us. God's word teaches that worry, over future security and our earthly possessions, is unnecessary. Instead, our focus should remain on Him and He will take care of the rest.