

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

Daniel

Who and what? Daniel, whose name means “God is judge,” is perhaps the best-known of the Hebrew prophets. The book by his name is half historical narrative (chs. 1 — 6) and half apocalyptic prophecy (chs. 7 — 12).

Where is it? Twenty-seventh Old Testament book, between Ezekiel and Hosea, Daniel is both a major prophet (content) and a minor prophet (length).

When and why? Daniel served in the sixth century before Christ, while God’s people were captive in Babylon and Medo-Persia. While Daniel was still a youth, Nebuchadnezzar’s armies attacked Jerusalem, took temple treasures, and carried away some of the best youth (including Daniel) to Babylon to serve the king (1:1-7). Nine years later, Nebuchadnezzar returned to sack the city and destroy the temple with fire.

Daniel is a man about whom nothing negative is recorded (others are Joseph and the sinless Jesus). Bible critics have found much fault with his book, however, though the New Testament endorses its miracles (Hebrews 11:33, 34), its prophecies (Matthew 24:15), and its report of angels (Luke 1:19, 26).

Two of a kind

Chapters 1 and 12: Daniel begins with a northern king’s attack on God’s holy mountain, resulting in a time of testing in which Daniel and his friends seek to be pure and undefiled (1:1, 8ff). At the end of the test, the faithful few were approved and promoted in the royal palace (1:14ff). So also the book’s conclusion: Under attack from the north, God’s remnant people, though tested and purified, will stand in judgment at the end of time and be rewarded by the King in the brightness of eternity (11:40ff; 12:1, 2-4, 10, 13, 14).

Chapters 2 and 7: Using a four-metalled man (ch. 2) and four wild animals (ch. 7), God shows His people’s future under Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the kingdom of God.

Chapters 3 and 6: Facing commands to worship false gods (ch. 3) and to cease prayer to Yahweh (ch. 6), Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel prove it is better to obey God than man.

Chapters 4 and 5: God exhibits sovereignty over proud monarchs, bringing Nebuchadnezzar to insanity and back (ch. 4) and delivering Belshazzar to his enemies (ch. 5).

Chapters 8 and 9: These include intriguing and puzzling predictions involving periods in Israel’s history: 2300 days (ch. 8) and 70 weeks (ch. 9).

Chapters 10 and 11: The last great vision of Daniel is introduced and recorded here and concluded in 12.

Apocalyptic: Daniel’s prophetic style, named for its colorful imagery, numerics, and dramatic historical intervention seen in visions and dreams. The book of Revelation is called The Apocalypse.

Dreams or visions:

- Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about a great metal image (2:1ff). With royal disdain, he required his advisors to tell both its content and its interpretation. After prayer, Daniel received a night vision of the king’s dream, telling both the content and the meaning of the dream (2:19ff; 29-36; 36-45). It portrayed four successive political settings for God’s people and the permanent establishment of God’s kingdom (2:44, 45).

- Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about a great tree cut down, representing how God would humble the proud king himself (4:4ff, 20ff). Daniel interpreted this dream also.

- Daniel received a night vision in which God reviewed the political future of His people. It showed the replacement of the threatening kingdoms of men by the everlasting kingdom of God (7:1ff).

- Daniel had another vision of future political influences, showing that the worst persecution of God’s people will only last a span (8:1ff).

- Daniel’s great vision of foes to the north and the south gives God’s people assurance that their time of being squeezed by a hostile world will come to an appointed end with resurrection, judgment, and eternal life (10:7 — 12:13).

Daniel in a sentence: While he and his brethren are captives in Babylon, Daniel remains faithful to God under test, gains official position there, interprets the kings’ dreams, and receives four visions of wide historical/political scope to encourage God’s people under oppression.

Other mysterious elements: secrets, puzzles (4:9; 5:12, 16); magicians, astrologers, soothsayers, sorcerers (2:2ff; 5:7); watchers (4:13, 17, 23); part of a man's hand writing on a wall (5:5, 24); a horn with eyes and a mouth (7:8, 20).

The angelic is prominent: fourth man in the fire (3:25); angels who shut lions' mouths (6:22); angels who fight unseen forces of evil (10:5-20, esp. 13, 20).

Picturesque animals: lion, bear, leopard, terrible beast (7:3-7). These correspond to the four sections of the metal image and represent the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia (2:37, 38; 5:30, 31), Greece and Rome. A ram and male goat represent the kingdoms of Medo-Persia and Greece (8:3-8; 20, 21).

Horns play a major role on some beasts. The terrible beast had ten, three of which are rooted out by an eleventh horn with a man's eyes and a big mouth (7:7, 8, 19-27). This little horn persecutes God's people and changes His truths, until it is judged (7:24-26). Also, the ram had two uneven horns, and the male goat's notable horn was broken and replaced by four others, one of which produced another little horn, similarly vicious (8:3, 5, 8-12).

Messianic previews:

- The stone strikes the image on the feet and grows to fill the whole earth (2:44).
- The fourth man appears in the fiery furnace (3:25).
- One like the Son of Man comes with clouds to the Ancient of days (7:13).
- Messiah the Prince is cut off, but not for Himself (9:25, 26).
- Michael the prince stands up for God's people in resurrection and judgment (12:1ff).

A man who prays: Daniel . . .

- purposed in his heart (1:8)
- requested emergency prayer from Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego (2:17, 18)

Numerics

1260: understood to be "a time and times and half a time" (or 3-1/2 years, 7:25). [360 + 2 x 360 + 1/2 x 360 = 1260] See also Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:6; 13:5.

2300: days from the taking away of the daily sacrifice until the sanctuary would be cleansed (8:9-14). Literally fulfilled when King Antiochus Epiphanes suspended Levitical worship in the Jerusalem temple in 172 B.C.

70: years the Jewish nation was held in Babylonian captivity (9:2). Also, weeks (70 "sevens" — 490 years) from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah (9:24-27). Literally fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ and His death, nearly 490 years after King Artaxerxes released Nehemiah (457 B.C.) to return and rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2).

1290 and **1335** days: enigmatic numbers that extend the 1260 base (12:11, 12). The annual time (360) is reduced to monthly, adding first a time (30), then times and half a time. [2 x 30 + 1/2 x 30 = 75] Fulfillment uncertain.

1844: the year in which Millerites expected the second coming of Christ. William Miller's study of Daniel led him to believe that the 2300 days represented years between the command to rebuild Jerusalem and the return of the Lord (8:14; 9:25). When October 22, 1844, became a great disappointment, some Millerites returned to their previous churches; some maintained the date but reinterpreted the event (Jesus entered into heaven's most holy place to begin the investigative judgment). Still others acknowledged the error of the date, but continued hoping for the soon return of Christ, while pursuing further reforms based on Scripture alone.

- did not cease praying three times a day when threatened with lions (ch. 6)
- confessed his sins and sins of his people in intercession and supplication (9:3-20)
- prayed with fasting for twenty-one days (10:2ff)

A God who rules: Daniel's God . . .

- brings people into others' favor (1:9)
- sets up and removes rulers (2:21; 4:25, 26, 32; 5:18, 19, 21)
- sees in the darkness and reveals secrets (2:22, 28, 47)
- has an everlasting kingdom (4:3, 34; 7:9-14, 27)
- is infinitely above all earthlings (4:35)
- always does truth and justice (4:37)
- performs His own will in heaven and earth (4:35)
- holds humans in His hands (5:23)
- is able to deliver His people from their hostile foes (3:17; 6:16)
- is to be trusted and obeyed even if He

does not deliver (3:18)

- is great and awesome, faithful and righteous (9:4, 7, 14)
- gives mercy to those who love and obey Him (9:4, 9)
- brings disaster upon those who do evil (9:12-16)

Prophecy's sure word:

The four dominant empires (chs. 2 and 7) came and went with wonderful accuracy. Descriptions of Alexander the Great's Grecian kingdom and of Antiochus Epiphanes (ch. 8) are also recorded history, as is the 490 years from Jerusalem's rebuilding until the Messiah's death (ch. 9). Most predictions in the last great prophecy (chs. 10 — 12) were fulfilled in ancient Persia and Greece (11:1, 2ff). We wait for the grand finale (ch. 12) at Christ's return.