

Daniel

Daniel 1-3

The book of Daniel opens in the year 605 BC, the same year Jeremiah had the assignment in Jeremiah 25. Nebuchadnezzar had just defeated Egypt and seized control of Jerusalem, leaving Jehoiakim on the throne as a vassal under oath to Babylon. Daniel and his friends, and others from the upper classes in Jerusalem, had been taken to Babylon as hostages and to be servants of the king of Babylon.

The book of Daniel falls readily into 2 parts, chapters 1-6 tell the story of Daniel and his friends interacting with the king(s) and authorities in Babylon, while chapters 7-12 are a collection of prophetic visions. However, the book is also divided and organized in another way, which is certainly intentional. In Daniel 2:4 the language of the text switches from Hebrew, the language of Canaan, to Aramaic, the language of Babylon. The Aramaic text continues through chapter 7 and then Hebrew is resumed in 8-12. The Aramaic section is arranged in parallels. Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar's dream, is paralleled in chapter 7, Daniel's vision of the same overview of history. Chapter 3, the 3 friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace, parallels chapter 6, Daniel in the lions' den. Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar's pride, parallels chapter 5, Belshazzar's pride. Chapters 8-12, written in Hebrew, are then an appendix of experiences, prayers, and visions that focus on the Holy People.

The central theme of Daniel is stated in 4:32 and 5:21: "the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (ESV)

Daniel 1 opens with the subjugation of Jerusalem to Babylon, and the removal of certain youths described in sacrificial terms (1:4), and removal of certain sacred vessels from the temple to Babylon. The ensuing contest between God and the gods and kings of Babylon will recur several times in the book, including the notable misuse of some of the temple vessels in chapter 5.

Daniel should remind us of Joseph, in his resolve (1:8, recall Genesis 39:6-9) and in his gifts (1:17, Genesis 40:8), and in the favor/grace given him (1:9, Genesis 39:4, 21) and his rise from the status of a slave to royal authority. Both Daniel and Joseph are foreshadows of Christ.

Daniel and his 3 friends had "natural" gifts from the hand of God (1:4, 17) and those were enhanced for their service by training and education. The literature of the Babylonians would have included mathematics and astronomy/astrology, their sciences and their myths and traditions.

The location of Babylon, "the land of Shinar" (1:2) takes us back to Genesis 10:10, 11:2, Nimrod and Babel when the nations were divided. Abram came from that area to Canaan, here the descendants of Abraham were transported back for a divine reset.

Daniel and his friends were clearly well mannered and personable in dealing with various officials, whereas they could have been grumblers and malcontents in the forced changes they'd experienced. Most likely, along with everything else, they were made eunuchs as part of their

preparation for royal service. In their trying circumstances, God blessed them in their faithfulness.

Daniel 2 opens a year into the training of Daniel and his friends, 604 BC. The various practitioners of magic arts in Babylon had ways of interpreting dreams, but when Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream and demanded the meaning without telling the dream itself, they were in trouble. This looks like a test, Nebuchadnezzar being skeptical of the practitioners of magic. He thought they were scammers, and he wanted truth, not a scam. The king gave the magicians rigid terms, tell the dream and its interpretation, and be richly rewarded, or die. The Chaldeans had no hope of meeting the king's demands, and were consequently condemned to death.

Chapter 2 verse 4, as noted above, switches the narrative language from Hebrew to Aramaic, which continues through chapter 7.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its meaning, given to Daniel in answer to prayer, was of an image depicting centuries of regional history, from Babylon to Persia to Greece to Rome to the Kingdom of God. The sequence emblemized in the man-shaped image of metals seen by Nebuchadnezzar is recapitulated with other details in a vision Daniel saw decades later (Daniel 7, about 553 BC).

Three times in the unveiling of the dream (Daniel 2:23, 2:30, 2:45) it's emphasized that God made this known to Nebuchadnezzar through the symbolism of the dream, and its interpretation. The word in the Greek Septuagint version of Daniel for "made known" here is the same as the word given to John in Revelation 1:1. The making known of God's plans through visions and symbols is the same.

The dream in Daniel 2 doesn't provide a timetable per se, but does provide a sequence that clearly sets the establishing of God's kingdom that would fill the earth in the days of what we know as the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:44) and the "stone" that began the process and grew into a great mountain that filled the earth (2:35, recall Ezekiel 40:2) is identified with Jesus (1 Peter 2:4).

One of God's purposes for Daniel was to make Himself known to Nebuchadnezzar and his court. We see a step in that direction in 2:47. Considering the time references in 1:1, 2:1, 1:5 and 1:18 the description of the advancement of Daniel and his 3 friends in 2:48-49 may be a summary statement, with some years in the process of proving and advancing, but the outcome of Daniel interpreting the king's dream was very similar to what happened to Joseph in Egypt in Genesis 41, when Joseph realized God had him there to save his family and many others.

Daniel 3 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's continued practice of Chaldean idolatry, despite his momentary acknowledgment of God in chapter 2. Many idolaters have acknowledged God but continue to worship their own pantheon of gods. The faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the face of adversaries (3:8) and the king are mirrored by Daniel decades later in 6:4ff. We get another glimpse of Nebuchadnezzar's personality (recall 2:5) in 3:13, his furious rage. The courage of the 3 Jews is monumental, rooted in faith in the God who had preserved

them and blessed them already. They would not bow to another god, under any threat.

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was built of millions of bricks fired in furnaces. One such furnace was put to use as an intended live crematorium for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They knew God could save them, but whether they would live or die they didn't know. They trusted God no matter what. The only thing that burned when the men fell into the fire was the bonds that constrained them, and Nebuchadnezzar, from a safe distance, saw the 3 plus another walking about in the fire. The fourth man had a supernatural appearance, "like a son of the gods" (not "like the Son of God" as in the KJV/NKJV). This was the observation of Nebuchadnezzar, a worshiper of gods, not a prophetic utterance signifying Jesus. As happened with Daniel in 6:22, God sent an angel to safeguard his servants.

Once again in 3:28-30 as in 2:47-49 Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God, and God's faithful servants were blessed for their faithfulness. The king was very much impressed, but not quite converted from his pagan heritage.

Daniel 4-6

Daniel 4 is a written message, a testimony, from Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Once again God made himself known to Nebuchadnezzar, and though his pride hindered the king from listening to God's message, in the end he was humbled and gave glory to God. Nebuchadnezzar's profession of faith in this chapter, along with Daniel's words several decades later in Daniel 5:21, strongly suggest that Daniel was God's instrument to lead Nebuchadnezzar into real faith. What little we know from history of the latter days of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is that he left off ravaging the nations. The testimony of Daniel is that Nebuchadnezzar truly learned the core message of Daniel, implicitly stated in Daniel 2:37-38 and 4:37, and explicitly stated in 4:17, 32 and 5:21. The Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will. What was true in Daniel's day is affirmed even more now, when the Son of Man has received all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18ff).

Nebuchadnezzar's royal message in Daniel 4 begins and ends with praise and glory to God. There is an acknowledgment in v3 of the dream message he received in chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar pictures himself as arrogantly enjoying ease and prosperity in his opulent royal residence when he "saw a dream" and had "visions." He tried the usual experts in matters of dream interpretation, to no avail, and then he had opportunity to tell Daniel his dream. Daniel soon understood the divine message in the dream and warned the king of what would happen, if he did not "break off your sins by practicing righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed..." (Daniel 4:27). It is remarkable that Daniel clearly had good will toward Nebuchadnezzar, the man who had ordered him transported as a slave from his home and family to Babylon, but clearly Daniel cared what happened to the king. It is also remarkable that Daniel could speak so boldly to the king who worshiped other gods about his sins and injustices. Most likely, this was not the first time Daniel had advocated a righteous path to Nebuchadnezzar, the dream was a dramatic opportunity to do so again.

The view of the monarch as a great tree giving shelter to various creatures is similar to the denunciation of Pharaoh in Ezekiel 31:1-9, and that imagery of a great and growing kingdom is applied to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13:31. The imagery of the shoot coming up from

the bound stump of the tree is also a shadow or type Christ coming up from the seemingly dead root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), especially with the mention of bronze and iron in Daniel 4:15, which in the dream image of chapter 2 were associated with the future kingdoms of Greece and Rome, the dominant cultures, languages, religions, and worldly powers of Jesus' day.

The "watchers" and "holy ones" in 4:13, 17, 23 reflect the thoughts and literature of Babylon's cosmology regarding the heavenly host that serves the Most High. Similar descriptions of a Divine Counsel gathered before God are found in Job 1, Psalm 82, Psalm 89:6-7, 1 Kings 22:19ff. This is the backdrop too of statements like Paul's reference to angels in 1 Corinthians 11:10.

As with the king of Babylon described in Isaiah 14, the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, the Pharaoh of Egypt in Ezekiel 31, and many others including the devil himself, pride was Nebuchadnezzar's downfall. But God gave him time and opportunity to repent. Humility and repentance were his only hope, and ours.

Daniel 5 is the flip side of Daniel 4. A successor of Nebuchadnezzar several decades later, in the 70th year of Babylonian ascendancy, Belshazzar was facing an imminent threat from Cyrus and the army of the Medes and Persians. The city was huge and well fortified, but a siege army was literally at the gates on the night of the revelry recorded. While it seems the height of arrogance for the king to have a feast in such a situation, perhaps by dedicating the festivities to the gods of metal (v4) he rationalized the excesses as sacrifices to invoke the good will of the gods in a time of need. What he did was lay the straw that broke the camel's back on the pile of blasphemies against the Most High God.

This king, Belshazzar, was 2nd in command, sitting as regent while his father, Nabonidus, ventured elsewhere.

The message written on the wall was trivial, but clearly had to be important given the supernatural means of writing it. It was terrifying and sobering. This was happening in 539 BC, 66 years after Daniel had been brought as an exile to Babylon. Daniel was a youth when he came, and must have been in his 80s at this time. He'd been overlooked in the years since Nebuchadnezzar passed, but not forgotten by everyone.

Daniel's divine insight into the writing on the wall condemned Belshazzar and his kingdom for pride, excess, and blasphemous idolatry (22-23). As a result of his prophetic interpretation condemning Belshazzar to die that night at the hands of the invaders, Daniel was indeed promoted to be next in authority in the whole kingdom, and that night the soldiers of Cyrus temporarily diverted water from the Euphrates River so that they could infiltrate the city via the riverbed, passing under the wall. The city fell to Cyrus that same night, and a vassal king was set in place. Chapter 5, again, is the flipside of chapter 4, the arrogant ruler who did repent and acknowledge God in 4, the arrogant king who was condemned for not heeding the lessons of his predecessor and resuming the course of arrogance and blasphemy.

Daniel 6 balances Daniel 3. The fiery furnace for not bowing to the king's great image, and the lion's den for bowing to the God of heaven and not praying to the king alone. In both stories the

hubris of the other officials was a catalyst for the persecution of the godly Jews. The kingdom has changed from Babylon to Persia, but the battle between light and darkness continues the same. Darius the Mede, like Nebuchadnezzar, was so impressed by the Most High that he issued a divine proclamation in his honor (compare 3:29-30 to 6:25-28).

Daniel really highlights the work of divine messengers. Angels in one form or another turn up repeatedly in chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and especially in chapters 7-12. Divine messengers are involved in the lives of the holy people, providing rescue and direction. They are engaged in bringing chastening or condemnation on the ungodly, and implementing divine purposes for the nations, or contesting with powerful spiritual adversaries who work against God's purposes. Daniel's perspective shows us a very busy unseen world that impacts our world all the time.

Daniel 7-9

Daniel 7, 8, and 9 are a series of 3 visions Daniel experienced at various times, and then a 4th vision in chapters 10-12.

The introduction of Daniel, 1:1-2:4 is written in Hebrew. From 2:4 through chapter 7 the language of the writing is Aramaic, grouping these chapters together. Chapter 7 belongs to the structure of 2-7 by language, and to 7-12 by the type of content.

Daniel 7 is dated "the first year of Belshazzar." That would be about 553 BC. Chronologically, Daniel's experience in chapter 7 fell between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. After Daniel's great success with Nebuchadnezzar, the change of regime must have been challenging for Daniel. He continued to work for the government, but he was marginalized, and little or no contact with the king. Perhaps that's one reason God gave Daniel this vision, to reassure him that God's plans were still on track.

The 4 beasts of Daniel 7:1-8 directly correspond to the four levels of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of chapter 2. Babylon (gold/lion), Medes and Persians (silver/bear), Greece (leopard/bronze), and Rome (iron and clay/terrifying and strong, with 10 horns). Daniel glimpsed symbolic details that weren't given to Nebuchadnezzar about the nature of each kingdom, and their portrayal as "beasts" is not complimentary. Daniel's vision of the beasts coming up out of the sea (a symbol of masses of people) is consistent with John's vision in Revelation 13 of the beast coming up out of the sea (another view of the 4th beast here, Rome). The 4 winds of heaven also occur in John's visions, in Revelation 7:1, as mighty supernatural forces of destruction.

One of the features of the 4th beast that really drew Daniel's attention was a boastful little horn, 7:8, 11, 20-21. The boastful little horn was so distracting to him it drew away his attention from the core message, the throne scene where the Son of Man was presented before the Ancient of Days (a scene also found in Revelation 4-5, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb of God). What Daniel saw here in 7:13 is the focal point of history, the victory of Jesus over death. Jesus claimed this prophecy by identifying himself constantly as "the son of man" and explicitly before the Sanhedrin he took possession of Daniel's vision (Matthew 26:64). The ascension of the resurrected Jesus in glory inaugurated the everlasting kingdom (7:13-14; and the rock that grew

to fill the earth in Nebuchadnezzar's dream).

Despite the vision centered on overcoming the beasts and enthroning the Son of Man, Daniel, like multitudes of his readers, was distracted by the noisy little horn. There are always boastful men exalting themselves against the Ancient of Days and his anointed, and when all is said and done, they are temporary distractions, subject to divine judgment. The kingdom belongs to the Son of Man (7:14) forever, and to his saints, holy ones, forever (7:22, 26-27). The thrones set in place and the court sitting in judgment in 7:9-10, 13-14 and 7:26-27 are both ends of Jesus riding the clouds, his ascension and his 2nd coming (recall Acts 1:9-11, Revelation 1:7) and the scene(s) is recapitulated in Revelation 4-5 and Revelation 20:4-6.

Daniel's vision, and the words of Jesus in Matthew 24-25, affirmed that God's holy people will always face opposition and persecution in this world, but the plan and promises of God are secure, and the Son of Man has received dominion, and his saints do and will reign with him. The boastful little horn of Rome or of any place and any generation is always finally a temporary distraction.

Daniel 8-12 returns to the Hebrew language used in 1:1-2:4.

Daniel 8 describes a vision Daniel had 2 years after the vision in chapter 7, again between chapters 4 and 5 historically. Daniel here was still an administrator in the kingdom, but his bureaucratic position was lower than the direct access to the king he'd formerly had under Nebuchadnezzar.

This vision focused on the two powers that would govern the region over the next few centuries. First Medo-Persia as a ram with disproportionate horns, one longer and higher than the other, signifying the dominant role Persia would enjoy. Their dominion began in 539 BC under Cyrus's leadership. Then a male goat challenged the ram, the Greeks advancing speedily under the unique rule of Alexander, 200 years later. Alexander's empire was rapidly gained, but short lived, because the king himself died young. Shortly after Alexander's death his 4 primary generals divided the kingdom among themselves, and then fell into conflict with each other. The basic identities of the combatants are given as angelic explanation in 8:15-16.

The little horn of this vision (8:9), being Greek, isn't exactly the same as the little horn of the previous vision (7:8), being Roman. However, they are the same in terms of spirit and ambition. The little horn in this vision can be identified (especially in connection with the vision in chapters 10-12) with the Seleucid kings who ruled Greek Syria, and became dominant in the holy land of Daniel's people. The one king in particular who fits the description of the vision is Antiochus IV, called Antiochus Epiphanes, who spent 168-164 BC trying to exterminate the Jewish faith and religious practices. Even prominent leaders among the Jews, including priests, went along with the Hellenizing efforts to effectively make the Jews into Greeks.

In 8:16 we are introduced to Gabriel, the first time in the Bible we have a specific name for an angel of God. Nebuchadnezzar's quest for understanding his dream brought Daniel into the picture. Daniel's quest for understanding brought Gabriel into the picture. Daniel's interaction with supernatural forces generally leaves him physically distressed (7:28, 8:27).

Daniel 9 is set in 539 BC, the year that Babylon fell. The time frame is Daniel 5:30-6:1.

Jeremiah and Baruch had worked together for years to collect and organize the prophet's messages. No doubt they made multiple copies to send to the exiles in Babylonia as well as for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Daniel had a copy of Jeremiah's work. He probably had seen and heard Jeremiah in person as a youth in Jerusalem. In a sense, Daniel is a success story from Jeremiah's ministry.

Daniel understood from the sacred Jewish writings (9:2) that Jeremiah had prophesied 70 years for Babylon, and that the 70 years was completed. Babylon had fallen to Cyrus and his allies, including Darius the Mede. Seeing that fulfilled, Daniel prayed for the restoration of his people (9:3-19), but with the full acknowledgment that as a people they were still sinning, and had no claim to righteousness. The restoration was dependant on God's mercy, not on Israel's righteousness.

The direct answer to Daniel's prayer was "not yet." Yes, people would go back, yes, the temple would be replaced after its own 70 year interval, but ultimately 70X7 would be required to deal with the problems of sin and disobedience and to initiate the kingdom of the anointed (messiah/Christ). The intervals given to Daniel seem to lead from the time of Nehemiah (opinions vary) being directed to rebuild the wall to the time of Jesus' ministry. There is a symmetry in this relating to the whole of the previous kingdom era, from Saul to Johoiachin/Zedekiah. Matthew 1:17 indicates that the real terminus of the Babylonian captivity was the coming of the Christ.

Daniel 10-12

The final message in Daniel is a visionary perspective on conflicts centered on God's holy people in chapters 10-12. The setting of the vision is 536 BC, the 3rd year of Cyrus. Daniel describes himself as mourning for 3 weeks as the prelude to the vision. Similarly, the previous angelic visit in chapter 9, 2 years earlier, had been precipitated by Daniel's prayer.

By the time Daniel was mourning here, some exiles had returned to Jerusalem and resumed sacrificial observances (Ezra 1:1-2:7). In the 2nd year they had even laid a foundation for a new temple (Ezra 2:8-12). However, the temple work attracted the attention of adversaries, whose opposition discouraged the Jews in Jerusalem and made them afraid to build (Ezra 4:1-5). This broken reset was the setting for Daniel's mourning and the angelic vision of Daniel 10-12.

While Daniel fasted for 3 weeks, a divine response was immediate, but conflict in spiritual realms delayed the delivery of the answer 21 days (Daniel 10:12-14). God's response to Daniel's prayer was immediate, yet for reasons Daniel could not perceive the delivery of that response was delayed 3 weeks. Saints need to understand that divine working involves factors and spiritual forces we may not be aware of or understand.

The mighty angel Daniel saw had an appearance (10:5-6) reminiscent of other visions of angels, including Ezekiel 1-2 and Revelation 1. He spoke for the Lord and was awesome in his

appearance and demeanor. Daniel was completely unnerved by the sight and sound.

There are supernatural principalities and powers entangled with the kingdoms of this world as noted in 10:13, 10:20-11:1, and 12:1. See also Ephesians 6:10-12, 1:20-21.

Do you suppose the Lord's messenger might speak to you as he did to Daniel in 10:19? We know that Jesus had experiences like that (Matthew 4:11, Luke 22:43) and so did Paul (Acts 27:23-24). The working of God's angels in behalf of God's people is a persistent theme in Daniel.

The "book of truth" in 10:21 is probably one of those "books" opened at the final judgment (Revelation 20:12), perhaps a heavenly account of God's plan for human history, perhaps an account of the very deeds and alliances of angels in their service or disservice to God and his people.

Daniel 11:1 steps back 2 years to the time Cyrus issued the proclamation that Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. The unseen conflict was underway already, with Michael and his allies contending for the remnant of Israel against the gods of the nations. The battle plan in chapter 11 included many maneuvers that would be very hard for the people of Judea.

The series of kings and conflicts overviewed in chapter 11 can be found itemized in many study Bibles and commentaries. The next 4 centuries, from 536 down to 165 BC are outlined with sufficient detail to historically identify the characters described. The accuracy of this prophetic series led materialistic skeptics in the 19th and 20th centuries to deny that Daniel could have been written in the 6th century BC. Scoffers have challenged and denied the veracity of Daniel, and by the grace of God their every objection has been met with evidence for Daniel's legitimacy and accuracy on every front in the past 200 years. Daniel was given an accurate glimpse with striking details of world events unfolding centuries after his own lifetime.

The 4th king mentioned in Daniel 11:2 is the king of Persia in Esther.

The kings of north and south are the Greek (Hellenistic) kingdoms of Syria and Egypt that were constantly in conflict after Alexander the Great died. Israel was generally caught in the middle for 150 years.

The king of Syria featured in 11:21-35 was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the last Greek ruler of Judea. He was also the little horn in Daniel 8:9-14, 23-26. Similar in character to the noisy little horn of Daniel 7:8, but in a different generation.

Twice Daniel heard of an abomination of desolation. First in Daniel 9:27 and again in 11:31. The historical events when Antiochus IV invaded Judea and attempted to wipe out Judaism and convert the temple to the worship of Greek gods was the specific event in 11:31, but Jesus told his disciples they'd see what Daniel foresaw during the Roman invasion of Judea and Jerusalem in 70 AD (Matthew 24:15). What happened with Antiochus IV is a paradigm, a pattern that recurs as the various "princes" of the nations wrestle for and against the purposes of God.

The self-willed king in 11:36-45 isn't specifically Antiochus IV, but is of the same character. The same character as the king of Assyria in Isaiah 10:12, or the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:4ff, or the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, or the pharaoh of Egypt in Ezekiel 29-31, or the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2, or the beast in Revelation 13. He is Gog following the messengers of Satan and the beast and the false prophet. Daniel 11:36-45 is like Matthew 24-25, a troubled world refusing God's truth, willingly misled by arrogant rulers into wars and rumors of wars and trouble and persecution of the saints.

When Daniel hears "at that time" in 12:1, it's the time of the defeat of the nations in the previous verses. It is surely connected with John's vision in Revelation 12:7-12 when Michael led heavenly forces victoriously against the dragon and his angels, defeating them by the blood of the Lamb and the gospel. The resurrection that follows, and opening the book of life in 12:1-2, begins with the Lamb's victorious resurrection as the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20), continues with those raised to new life in him (Romans 6:1-11) and culminates in the final resurrection of the good and the bad when Jesus comes again (John 5:25-29).

The gathering of knowledge in 12:4 isn't necessarily good or bad in itself, it depends on what sort of knowledge, why it is sought, and how it is used. Our "information age" of the computer driven internet is certainly such a time of people running to and fro and knowledge increasing, but not necessarily for good.

When the angelic messengers (the speaker plus 2 more, 2 or 3 witnesses) speak of when, we have again the half of seven, 3 ½, time, times and half a time, which will also be repeated several times in Revelation. Like many others, Daniel heard but did not understand (12:8). The point of the finite numbers mentioned really is to convey that there is a divine plan, that like Daniel (and for that matter, the angels themselves), we don't necessarily have the insight to sort out God's timetable, but we can do as v10 says, understanding how to live, and like Daniel, we can go our way, follow the path God has given us, until the end, knowing that we will stand where we belong at the end of days (12:13). Make sure you belong among the wise who shine like stars.
The