

Series: The Book of Daniel
Title: The Introduction
Text: Daniel 1

Introduction

In 721 B.C. Assyria swept out of the north, captured the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and took the ten tribes into captivity. Assyria was named for the god Ashur and was located in the plains of Mesopotamia. It was bordered on the west by the Syrian desert, the south by Babylonia, and on the north and east by Persia. Today that area is primarily the nation of Iraq.

Judah followed Israel, turned away from God, and pursued the idols and foreign gods of the other nations. God warned them, but they continued their idolatry, eventually leading to their captivity in Babylon. The Monarchy ended with the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of Judah to Babylon in 586 B.C.

When Nebuchadnezzar marched against Jerusalem, he subjugated Jehoiakim and the following kings of Judah, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Judah was actually subject to Babylon 20 years before the deportation. If you add these 20 years to the fifty years of exile, you have the seventy years of captivity referred to by Jeremiah.

Zedekiah was the last national king in the Davidic line until Christ came. Jesus was the rightful heir to David's throne. But He was rejected and crucified, leaving the Chosen People with no king for over 2,500 years.

After Zedekiah and most of the Judaeans were removed to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, a man of good birth and position, to be their Governor and provide for the poor remnant left in the land. (2 Kings 25:22) Gedaliah would not reign for long. One of the Royal descendants, named Ishmael, plotted to murder him. Gedaliah invited Ishmael and ten princes to Mizpah, and there, at his own table, they slew him, and two days later, they slew eighty men who had come to visit Gedaliah. (Jeremiah 40:13-16)

Ishmael took all the inhabitants of Mizpah and headed for Ammon, but Johanan and the captains of his forces pursued him and recovered the captives, but Ishmael and eight men escaped to the Ammonites. The rescued remnant asked Jeremiah to seek the Lord's guidance to determine whether they should remain in Judaea or go to Egypt. Jeremiah told them that God said to stay in the Promised Land, but they refused to believe him. They went down to Egypt and took Jeremiah and Baruch with them. In Egypt, they fell into greater idolatry and were sternly condemned by the aging Prophet, Jeremiah, so they killed him.

The fate of the Jewish remnant in Egypt happened just as Jeremiah had prophesied. In 568 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar successfully invaded Egypt and dethroned the Pharaoh, Hophri. Josephus says that the Jews not slain at this time were all deported to Babylon.

Babylon was the Capital of the Chaldean Empire. The city of Babylon was a vast square, intersected by the Euphrates River. Each side had a length of 15 miles enclosed by walls more than 370 feet high and so wide that between the buildings that lined each side, there was enough room for a four-horse chariot to turn around.

The magnificence of Babylon exceeded that of any other city in the world of that day. A hundred bronze gates gave entrance to the enormous city where parks and gardens were intermingled with the houses and gave the appearance of suburbs of a great metropolis. The streets all ran in straight lines parallel and intersecting to the river. The lavish Palace of the Kings was itself a city within a city. It had a circuit of seven miles. Its hanging gardens rose one above another to more than seventy feet. Its walls were gorgeous with paintings and sculptures.

But the most beautiful architecture of all was the Temple of Bel-Merodach. It stood in a square enclosed with a side of 440 yards. In the middle, a tower of solid masonry, built like a pyramid, square upon a square, with the lowest having a side of 220 yards. The Temple proper was a silver shrine six hundred feet high, shining out over the vast plains surrounding it. The materials of the temple were brick and bitumen. They were constructed to yield effects as bright and varied as those produced by porcelain or metal. The different stages of the Temple were black, orange, crimson, gold, deep yellow, brilliant blue, and silver white.

That is the Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar boasted he had created in Daniel 4:30, and that is the Babylon where Daniel and his companions passed their days.

Daniel – The Man (B.C. 606-534)

Daniel was born during the reign of Josiah, probably about the time when the king began his great work of reformation in B.C. 623. He was of noble birth and perhaps of the royal family of Judah. The name Daniel means "God is my judge" in Hebrew. Daniel spent his childhood and early youth during a religious revival, which undoubtedly shaped his character. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and probably acquainted with Habakkuk. When he was about 17 years old, Nebuchadnezzar deported him to Babylon with other Jews.

In Chapter 1, Daniel gives the date of the deportation, which serves to document the beginning of the 70 years of captivity that Jeremiah had predicted. Daniel lived through the whole period of the Empire of Babylon from B.C. 606-538 B.C. and the first four or five years of the Persian period, 538-534 B.C.

The book of Daniel covers a period of 72 years, and Daniel himself probably lived to be about 92 years old.

Daniel – The Book

Daniel never claimed to be a prophet, and nowhere in the Old Testament is he spoken of as a prophet. The Hebrew Scriptures do not include Daniel in the

Prophets, but in the Hagiographa, a group of miscellaneous writings containing thirteen Old Testament books. However, part of this Book is prophetic and begins a new era in the history of prophecy as being apocalyptic.

Daniel, more than any other writer, presents us with a Philosophy of History and shows the relation of the Kingdoms of the world to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is sovereign and eternal, immanent in history and revealing the Messiah's progressive and final triumph. The book is not a history of the captivity but a revelation of God's conquering and enduring Kingdom. Daniel's writing is full of encouragement, prophesying that beyond their present sufferings, there would be a kingdom established by God that would never pass away.

There are two divisions to the Book of Daniel. First, In Chapters 1-6, God's faithfulness in exile, and second, in Chapters 7-12, the promise of a better future. Even in exile, God watches over Daniel and guides his promotion to prominence in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Daniel's apocalyptic emphasis describes a series of visions concerning the four great empires of the ancient world.

The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation provide invaluable information of the last days of Israel before the Millennium. There are four great takeaways from this incredible writing.

I. God Rewards Authentic Dedication

Daniel focuses on what true dedication to God means.

It's important to realize that authentic dedication to God does not guarantee your circumstances will change anytime soon. Daniel's dedication to God causes him to refuse to be a victim of his circumstances. He never gives up. He never blames everyone else. He holds to his commitment and trust in God despite overwhelming odds and becomes living proof that God can bless you even when everything around you seems hopeless. Time after time, Satan moves to destroy Daniel's testimony and service, and each time Daniel turns to God and experiences Divine deliverance.

Daniel is a perfect example of someone who puts God first and trusts in God's provision and deliverance. He refused to allow the circumstances to dictate his thoughts and feelings. Do you live your life by your faith in God? or by your feelings about the circumstances you're facing?

II. God Corrects Those He Loves

The book of Daniel also illustrates how God cares and provides for those He loves.

Some think that when Israel went into captivity, God turned His back on them. But God made sure Israel was well represented when they went into captivity. Daniel, along with Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego, held significant positions in the inner courts of the Babylonian government. Even though God brought judgment upon

Israel for her idolatry and disobedience, He never gave up on her. Sometimes it takes hardships for us to do the soul-searching we need to do to determine where we've gone wrong and been disobedient to God.

Trials can be harrowing experiences and leave us with a great sense of loss. When we lose our focus in faith, we start to desire this material world more than our relationship with God, putting us on a path that spells Divine correction. Refocusing your faith when you've lost your way can be expensive and painful.

Hebrews 12:6 says, "FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present but painful; nevertheless, afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed." (Hebrews 12:6-13 NKJV)

We don't correct our children because we love to abuse them; we correct them because we love them and want them to learn to choose wisely. Israel's best interest was always in the heart of God. Even when they were captives in a foreign land and lost their national identity, God still loved them and wanted them to return to Him. Even during the captivity, God allowed them to live in peace and know that one of His servants was strategically placed to care for their needs and give them hope.

In addition, Daniel gave them some remarkable prophecies about Israel's future, declaring that God would turn away their captivity, and they would return to the Promised Land.

III. God Comforts the Afflicted

The Book of Daniel is also a book of comfort.

It was terrible to be punished in a pagan land by pagan people. But God continued to give them messages through Daniel and Ezekiel that He really cared about them. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for

your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation." (2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NKJV)

Paul had been brought to the gates of death through persecution and severe illness more than once. His testings were intense, but his recovery was often quite miraculous. And throughout his life, his trust in Christ never wavered. When we dare to believe, like Paul, that God will deliver us, we will experience the comfort and peace of Christ in the midst of our sufferings.

In the Book of Isaiah, God says, "*Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'*" If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, *If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you Shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the LORD honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."* (Isaiah 58:6-14)

How would you say you measure up? Are you the afflicted one, or are you God's comforter?

IV. God Knows the Future

Finally, Daniel tells us how the story of how the world will end.

Daniel is the Old Testament Book of Revelation. In the book of Daniel, the Holy Spirit introduces us to the great eternal secrets of the future and how to live life in difficult times. Daniel and Revelation both use an apocalyptic writing style, using symbols and warnings that the end of the age was fast approaching. Because Daniel's writing is so detailed and accurate in describing world events, some scholars believe it had to be written sometime after the events occurred. But Daniel attributes his knowledge of future events as inspired and revealed by God, who knows all past, present, and future events.

When Daniel asks God to reveal to him Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Chapter 2 says, "Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what *is* in the darkness, And light dwells with Him. "I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand." (Daniel 2:19-23 NKJV)

The prophet Amos writes this about biblical prophecy, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7 NKJV)

Daniel didn't come up with these things on his own. God is not limited in His understanding of the future? He told Isaiah, "For I *am* God, and *there is* no other; *I am* God, and *there is* none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.'" (Isaiah 46:9-10 NKJV)

A comforting thought is that God knows your future! God loves you and wants you to know that your eternal destiny is safe in Christ. Right now, we can only see events in the present. We can speculate and prepare for the future as best we can, but only as we trust in Christ can we be certain that God will protect and provide for us tomorrow. How certain are you about your eternal future? Do your plans include trusting in God? Do hardships and sufferings bring you closer to God and more resolute in your faith?

The Book of Daniel gives us a vivid picture of how faith in God and an excellent spirit can cause us to rise above all the negative forces Satan may bring against us.

Conclusion

The book of Daniel is an amazing book!

It is a book about dedication to God and how God rewards those who remain dedicated to Him with His blessing. It is a book about God's love for His Chosen People. It is a book that reveals a hope for a better future for those in captivity. And it is a book that tells us how this world will come to an end. It is an ancient writing with relevant and current teaching. It is a message that will give you hope and guidance to overcome during your most difficult moments.

Get ready for an incredible journey through one of the Old Testament's most impressive and extraordinary books.