

The Book of Daniel

Week 1: Introduction & Chapter 1

Introduction

Author: Daniel (*possibility that 1-6 was a historian*)

Date: 605-538 B.C. (*Babylonian Captivity, 605, 597, 587*)

Location: Babylon

Key Characters: Daniel (Beltshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), Azariah (Abednego), King Nebuchadnezzar, King Belshazzar

Structure: The book of Daniel is separated in two halves, chapters 1-6 and 7-12. There are multiple distinct changes that separate the halves:

1. Chapters 1-6 are spoken in THIRD person, 7-12 in FIRST person
2. Chapters 1-6 are more HISTORICAL, 7-12 more PROPHETICAL
3. Chapters 1-6 are about BABYLON, 7-12 are about EVERYONE

Another unique aspect of the book of Daniel (only found elsewhere in Ezra) is that it's written in two languages: Chapters 1 & 8-12 are written in Hebrew, while 2-7 are written in Aramaic. One reason for this is that because Aramaic was the common language of Daniel's day, he may have written the very clear, God-oriented portion of his book in a way that could reach more people.

It's also important to note that those specific chapters, 2-7, create a chiasm, which is when something is structured normally for one part, but in reverse for the second part. In Daniel, chapters 2-4 are structured as "vision, hope, pride" whereas chapters 5-7 are structured "pride, hope, vision". Chiasm acts as a 1-2 punch to drive home a point by enabling the reader to look at the same topic, story, or theme a different way. In Daniel, using a memorable literary technique was important because chapters 2-7 encompass almost 70 years.

Themes: The book of Daniel contains a lot of themes, specifically because the structure is so complex. Daniel has things to say to Israelites in captivity, Babylonians, future readers, and even to just himself as later in the book Daniel takes some time to meditate and pray. Some of those themes we will see are:

God is sovereign over the kings and kingdoms of Earth – Just like with disobedient kings of Israel/Judah, God also works to show his power over the kings who aren't part of his holy nation, but still interact with it. We've seen this many times when Israel marched through Canaan, interacting with kings and peoples inhabiting their lands, but here we get a unique flashback to how God deals with kings even outside of Israel's land and people, something we haven't seen since Egypt.

God's kingdom is eternal – While the first half of the book is very historical, reminding us of the power that ruling nations had, the second half of the book reminds the reader of the temporal nature of earthly kingdoms contrasted to the eternal kingdom of God.

God keeps His promise to His people even when they are found in ungodly environments – As we look at some stories about the Israelites in captivity away from their homeland, we will be reminded that being away from Israel/Judah does not mean being away from God.

Prayer is an important resource in the midst of conflict – Multiple times in this story Daniel takes time to pray, showing the importance of having a constant relationship with God, which doesn't always fix problems, but can always reset the focus of the troubled believer.

Chapter 1

Verses 1 and 2:

These verses set the scene. Unlike his father (Josiah) before him, King Jehoiakim was an evil king and led the people to rebellion. It's almost impressive how quickly Jehoiakim led the people to rebel, because he became king in 609 B.C. The people clearly wanted to go back to their old ways even after Josiah worked his entire life to bring them back to the faithfulness of his forefather David. But because of their rebellion, they were taken in captivity.

But who does Daniel say caused the fall of Israel/Judah? What foundational theme is Daniel trying to build his book upon? God. He gave them over to the Babylonians. But despite Babylon seemingly having control, Daniel reminds us that it's actually God still in control.

After bringing the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt and creating laws for His new nation, He told them that if they, as a nation, rejected Him, He would give them over to their enemies. Why is exile an acceptable punishment for rebellion? (hint: what doesn't exile remove?) God's promise was to the people, not the land, and sometimes something as harsh as exile was necessary to fix the people, which would result in restoring the land, but the people were the primary focus. We should therefore expect faithfulness to be rewarded while the Israelites are in exile, as that would remind them of the reason God allowed it in the first place.

Verses 3-7:

Who were the people chosen for the first exile? Why would they be the first people invading kings might want to imprison/exile? The first people taken were the nobles, the wise, and the beautiful. If a king could turn the best of the best, the rest of the nation would more naturally follow suit. Just think of how Americans idolize celebrities.

What was the significance of Babylonian officials changing the names of the captives and teaching them their own history, literature, and customs? The fastest way to change someone's view of themselves and their rulers is to give them a new identity, make them feel like they were raised as Babylonians. This is similar to how prisoners are often referred to by numbers.

What was the problem with the king offering the exiles the food from his own table? Unlike many of the other things they taught the exiles to learn or do, Israelites had laws forbidding the consumption of certain foods. This offering from the king served as a difficult temptation that pitted faith against comfort.

Verses 8-16:

Daniel (along with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) was one of the only exiles documented to reject the king's offer of food and stay faithful to the laws of his faith. What's significant about how Daniel communicated this to the chief eunuch? What did he do after the eunuch responded with his own concerns? Daniel didn't forcefully reject the food, but talked to the chief eunuch and asked for something else to eat. After the eunuch responded that he was afraid of the king punishing him for Daniel being undernourished, Daniel offered a solution and compromise.

What was the result of the test? Where do we see God at work here? The result was Daniel and his companions were far healthier than the other servants who ate the king's food. God was at work through both Daniel being favored by the eunuch. This resulted in the rare occurrence of a chief eunuch not only listening to a servant, but also agreeing to a compromise in the end.

Verses 17-21:

While God working through the eunuch was a bit more subtle, how do these verses more blatantly show God at work through Daniel and his companions? The four of them were blessed by God with knowledge and wisdom, and Daniel was given the gift of interpreting visions and dreams.

When the four faithful exiles were brought before the king along with all the other servants, Nebuchadnezzar found them to be far superior to the rest. In fact, they were so knowledgeable and wise that the king preferred them to not just other servants, but also his own magicians and enchanters! Why were they so quickly and easily able to surpass the royal magi? (hint: where did each get their knowledge from?) While the court magi got their knowledge from either themselves or evil spirits, Daniel and his companions got their knowledge from the very one who created knowledge. The fact that they were ten times more knowledgeable is actually a bit underwhelming if we think of it that way!

Conclusion:

Chapter 1 of Daniel prepares the reader for the following narrative. It teaches us when and why the Israelites were in Babylon, why Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were there first, and how they became exalted. Chapter 1 also introduces God into the story in multiple ways and instances. This should lead the reader to expect:

1. God will continue to show up actively working in the lives of the exiles.
2. The four exiled companions will take notable actions because of their superior faithfulness and wisdom.