

The Book of Daniel

Week 6: Chapters 1-7 Conclusion / 8-12 Introduction

Chapters 1-7

The book of Daniel is divided into two parts: 1-7 and 8-12. Within those divisions are other divisions which help us understand the purpose of each part of Daniel. Chapters 1-7 can be further divided two ways: 1-6 which forms the narrative portion of Daniel and is the exact halfway point of the book, and 2-7 which is the Aramaic portion of Daniel which creates a self-contained book and chiasm.

Let's start with 1-6. 1-6 make up the narrative story of Daniel precisely because they are written/told chronologically. 1 is the beginning of Daniel's journey to Babylon and 6 is the end. Once you hit chapter 7 you are taken from Darius backwards to the time of Belshazzar. Beginning at chapter 7 you start chronologically again, but we'll get there.

The other division in chapters 1-7 is 2-7, which make up the Aramaic portion of Daniel. That leads the reader to ask, "Why would Daniel not choose 1-6, the simple chronological narrative, to be the Aramaic part? Why go 2-6, and then end randomly with a vision that took place during chapter 5?" The answer to that question lies in a literary technique called the Chiasm. It would have been much simpler to just write 1-6 in Aramaic, but Daniel clearly had a message he wanted to get through to the reader, so he chose the road less traveled. He threw chronology out the window and trusted that his grammatical structure would help more than what a scrambled timeline would hurt.

Let's briefly re-examine the stories of those chapters:

2: Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream/vision and God's power is first revealed to the king.

3: Nebuchadnezzar becomes proud and defies Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's God only to be humbled by how little power Babylonian "gods" have compared to Yahweh.

4: Daniel interprets another dream of Nebuchadnezzar's, Nebuchadnezzar is full of pride and subsequently humbled by God, but God redeems Nebuchadnezzar, creating a story eerily similar to Israel's current position.

5: Belshazzar becomes full of pride and disrespects God, Daniel interprets writing on the wall, and Belshazzar is humbled, but this time through death.

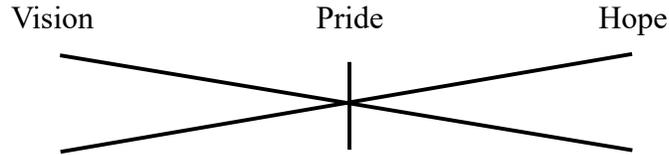
6: Darius let's his ego and pride get the best of him and writes an edict that directly interferes with faithfulness to God only to be humbled by how little his laws compare in power to God's law.

7: Daniel interprets his own dream and is fear-struck by the power God reveals to him, reacting in a way that mirrors Nebuchadnezzar's reaction the first time he had a vision.

Now 2, 3, 6, and 7 are easy to put into the Chiasm. 2 and 7 very clearly focus on the **visions** Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel received and their response to God's power being made known to them. 3 and 6 are about kings who are **proud** in the face of God, make foolish decrees, and God showing his power in response, **humbling** the proud, and saving his servants each time. But 4 and 5 are a little more difficult, namely 5. 4 is clearly a story of **hope** that the other stories don't give. The trick is that 5 is also about hope, but the other side of the coin. Where 4 showed this clear picture of redemption when Nebuchadnezzar returned to God, 5 shows what happens when those who oppose God refuse to humble themselves and continue to be faithless. Despite being a scary message for the unbelievers, this was actually a very comforting message for God's people. They thought their captivity might never end,

and God would just keep them in Babylon until they died, but God showing that he would not tolerate faithless kings meant that God wouldn't allow Israel to stay captive.

Chapters 2-4 are structured



Chapters 5-7 are structured



Now, that's great for the Israelites and for us because it reminds us of the power of our God, but what about the non-Christian reader. After all, this chiasm was written also for the Aramaic readers. What would it teach them?

To answer that we need to look at the chapters again. This time we're going to focus on the subject of each chapter. Who is the "main" character that God or his servant has to deal with in each chapter.

2. Nebuchadnezzar
3. Nebuchadnezzar
4. Nebuchadnezzar
5. Belshazzar
6. Darius
7. Daniel/Everyone

The Aramaic book of Daniel begins very slowly, following the life of one king. As the second half of the story progresses, the timeline begins to speed up very quickly. 2-4 take place over 11 years, but 5-7 take place over 35 years.

Knowing that Daniel 2 and 7 both contain the same prophetic image, and knowing that as the story progresses, time moves faster, what message might Daniel be trying to convey by writing just this section in Aramaic? What is he trying to tell the unbeliever?

God's kingdom is coming fast. From beginning to end, it's all about God, his power, and his kingdom that will never end. And Daniel hits the reader on the head over and over again, faster and faster until he culminates with a vision of death and destruction, a vision so fierce that even Daniel, God's faithful servant, is afraid.

What Daniel does with the first half of his book is write one story with two different lessons. The believers will follow a chiasm built around God's power and faithfulness. The unbelievers will follow a narrative story rapidly approaching judgment and destruction. Daniel writes in such a way that two incredibly different stories are told with the same words.

Chapter 1 and 7 play important roles in the Jewish understanding of Daniel. 1 helps the reader identify where the story falls in their ancestor's past. 7 prepares the reader for prophetic fulfillment in their future. Each transition is immediately followed by a change in language. And that brings us to chapter 8.

Chapters 8-12

Following chapter 7 and the end of the Aramaic section of Daniel, chapter 8 continues the new chronological story in Daniel. Following 7, which took place in the days of Belshazzar, chapters 8-12 during the reigns of Darius and then Cyrus.

Unlike chapters 1-7, 8-12 is not a narrative third person story, but instead a first person retelling of the events of Daniel's life. These chapters dive much deeper into the specific feelings and responses that a faithful exile would have in response to God's power.

Daniel changes from Aramaic to Hebrew because the intended audience is now specifically the exiles. The common person would not understand the nuances of Daniel's vision and God's kingdom, but those who had been raised in the faith would. This is akin to how we use specific language like "justification" and "atonement" and "begotten" because we have been taught what those words mean, but we wouldn't use those words when talking to people outside the church because they would make no sense. Daniel is now writing to just his fellow believers so they might understand God's plan through his visions like he does.