



The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

Daniel

Chapters 1-13

¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.

²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

--Daniel 1:19-20

God is in Control!

Daniel's name means, "God is my Judge". He is the author and main character of the book of Daniel. The prophet Daniel was a Jewish exile in Babylon. He was taken in the first deportation during the time of King Jehoiakim (609-597). He was a member of the Babylonian royal court under both Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. After the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians, Daniel then served the governor of the region, Darius the Mede.

While ministry of Daniel spanned almost 70 years, the visions and prophecies spoken and recorded by him cover vast periods of time from the immediate rise and fall of 4 major empires culminating in the advent of the Messiah to the final conflict at the end of time.

The structure of Daniel book is complex. For one thing it is written in two languages: Aramaic (the lingua franca of that time) and Hebrew (the language of the Jews). Chapters 1, 8-13 are written in Hebrew and 2-7 are written in Aramaic. It is often asserted that the Aramaic sections are written for the broader Jewish/Gentile audience and the Hebrew sections only for the Jews.

Also, the first half of the Book 1-6 is written in a narrative form telling the story of Daniel's interpretation of the dreams and visions of Gentile rulers. While the second half of the book (chapters 7-13) describe 4 visions given uniquely to Daniel which are interpreted to him by the Angel Gabriel.

Chapter 7 is written in the Aramaic of the first half of the book, and yet belongs to the second half the book as vision given to Daniel. Certainly, the central "hinge" chapter in Daniel is chapter 7 where we read of the vision of the Ancient of Days and the one "like a son of man" who ascends to the heavenly throne (Dan. 7:9-14).

Chapter 7 as a central section provides the unifying theme for the entire book. Daniel and his readers are privileged to see what lies behind the curtain of history and world events. The earthly battles fought by empires and kings reflect a larger war taking place in the heavens. The Lord is sovereign over all nations. Kings and rulers rise and fall. But overall, the Ancient of Days and his anointed king, 'the son of man' rule over them all. Kings make plans, but God is in firmly control.



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Literary Structure

So taking into consideration the various elements of Daniel we arrive at the following literary structure.⁴¹

Concentric Structure Establishing God's Sovereignty over Gentile Empires						Visions Given to Daniel			
Historical Setting						Vision 1	Vision 2	Vision 3	Vision 4
	A	B	C	C'	B'	A'			
	Dream Four-part Image	Refusal to Worship Image	Humbling of King Neb	Humbling of King Bel	Refusal to Stop Praying	Four Beasts	Ram and Goat	Seventy Weeks	Final Vision Antiochus — Antichrist
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10-12
Hebrew	Aramaic					Hebrew			

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand..." Dan. 2:44

God is Sovereign over Gentile Empires (1-6)

In the first half of Daniel, we read of Daniel and his three Jewish companions, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego). Chapter 1 provides the historic and court setting for these four men. Chapter 2-6 demonstrates how these men rose to prominence in the Babylonian and Persian courts by being true advisors and people of absolute integrity in faithfulness to the Lord.

The Babylonian emperor is given a dream which his Babylonian advisors could neither provide nor interpret. However, Daniel with the revelation of God was able to provide both the dream and its interpretation. The dream contained images of a great 4 part image. Daniel would reveal that these represent 4 kingdoms which will be broken beginning with Babylon and culminating in a kingdom of bronze and clay. Over them all will reign a kingdom which will never be destroyed which is a "stone cut from a mountain by no human hand" (Dan. 2 44-45).

⁴¹ Tanner, J. Paul, The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel (Biblio Sacra 160 (July - September 2003): 269-82.



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In Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar sets up a physical golden image of himself. The refusal of Daniel's companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the image leads to their death sentence to in the fiery furnace. Their commitment to worship the Lord was more important to them than their lives. While the men were in the furnace Nebuchadnezzar sees their deliverance at the protection of God.

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever,

*for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand. --Dan. 4:34-35
or say to him, "What have you done?"*

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."²⁵ He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." -- Daniel 3:24-25

In chapters 4 and 5, the two rulers of Babylon are humbled through divine dreams and visions interpreted by Daniel--A mighty tree (4) and the handwriting on the wall (5). Both kings arrogantly test the sovereignty of the Lord and both are humbled for their arrogance.

The song of praise offered by Nebuchadnezzar is a clarion call to all kings and ruler who would set themselves higher than the king of Heaven (Dan. 4:34-35) In Chapter 6, Daniel will have his own occasion to bear witness to determined faith in YHWH when he braves the lion's den rather than refusing to pray to the Lord.

While the Israelites are in exile, they must remain faithful to the Lord above all. God will use his servants to humble kings. The pressure to compromise will be intense--fear of fire and lions. However, the saints of God will triumph with faithfulness to the Lord--the king of Heaven. The main point of all of these stories becomes clear in chapter 7--The Ancient of Days is on his throne.



The Bible Challenge

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The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man (7)

The 'hinge' chapter of Daniel is Chapter 7. This chapter has literary, theological and thematic resonances with what comes before and after it within the entire book.

In the vision, Daniel sees four beasts. These seemingly correspond to the four parts of the image of the 4 part statue in chapter 2. Most interpreters believe that the four parts/beasts represent the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires which are then followed by the advent of Kingdom of God/Stone/Son of Man.

Certainly, the New Testament writers applied all of these themes to the coming of Jesus. His favorite self title was "son of man".

The controlling power over all kings and empires is the throne of the Ancient of Days. Daniel's vision centers on the ascent of the "one like a son of man":

¹³ "I saw in the night visions,

*and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.*

*¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed. Dan. 7:13-14*

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:9-10

In the New Testament, this moment is described by Luke in the book of Acts 1:9-10.

Daniel's concern is the 4th beast. The fourth beast becomes a vision not only of Rome but a type of the final enemy of God and his people at the end of times. The remainder of the book turns to this theme.



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The Visions of Daniel (8-12)

In the final chapters of Daniel, he records 3 more visions which he received from the Lord. These visions are interpreted by the Angel of the Lord for the "time of the end" (8:17).

The first vision of chapter 8, the ram and the goat is in the near term for Daniel about the rise of the Greek king Antioches Epiphanes who persecuted the Jews and profaned the temple during the Maccabean period (168 BC). However, Antioches may prefigure future antichrists culminating in The Antichrist at the end of the age.

In Chapter 9, Daniel's vision comes to him upon reading and praying in response to Jeremiah's prophecy of "seventy years" of exile (Jer. 25:12). The angel Gabriel reveals that there would be an additional 70 weeks of years which would culminate in the coming of the Messiah, his death and the end of the sacrificial system.

²⁴ "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. ²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. ²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

- Dan. 9:24-27



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In the final vision, it is revealed to Daniel that the battles of empire that he sees on earth are a manifestation of the war taking place in the heavens fought by the angels of God.

Daniel is given a vision of an ultimate and final conflict. The final victory will belong to the Lord and his people. The faithful dead will be raised to new life and will be given the glory of God:

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. --Dan. 12:1-3
