

II. Daniel

I. Background and Context

- A. The events of Daniel take place between the time of his exile in 605 B.C. (1.1) until the third year of King Cyrus in 536 B.C. (10.1).
- B. Daniel's name means "God is my Judge." He was a man of noble blood who served in the court of King Jehoiakim before living in the Babylonian and Persian courts in exile.
- C. Some scholars have argued that this book was written during the second-century B.C., and that Daniel's writings are actually "prophecies after the fact," attributed to the historical character Daniel after they have already come true. Like other prophets, we should assert that Daniel is the likely author of the book, as the book makes no indication otherwise.
- D. The central theme of the book is "God's sovereignty over history and empires"¹; God can set up and remove kings and empires as he wills, and will continue to do so until he establishes his own kingdom, which will never pass away (2.44, 7.27).
- E. The book of Daniel contains narratives about Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (chs. 1-6), as well as apocalyptic visions (chs. 7-12). These two halves are linked together by many literary features, such as use of dates, language, imagery, and message.
- F. Other key themes:
 1. It is possible to live a faithful life in exile, surrounded by pagan influences and propaganda, if one sets one's mind to serving the Lord wholeheartedly (ch. 1).
 2. God humbles the proud and raises up the humble (chs. 4, 5).
 3. This world will be a place of torment and persecution for the saints until the end, getting worse and worse rather than better and better (chs. 2, 7). Yet the Lord will judge the kingdoms of this world and establish his own which will never end.
 4. In the meantime, saints must be patient and faithful, looking to the Lord alone for deliverance (11.33-35).²
- G. While it may be easy to get caught up in the mysterious nature of Daniel's apocalyptic visions, we should focus on the principles conveyed by these visions that are valid throughout history: "the spiritual conflict between good and evil and God's sovereign control of history and nature."³

II. Outline

- A. Daniel and the Three Friends at the Babylonian Court (1.1-6.28)
 1. Prologue (1.1-21)
 - a) Daniel and his friends taken into exile (1.1-7)
 - b) Daniel and his friends remain undefiled (1.8-16)
 - c) Daniel and his friends promoted and preserved (1.17-21)
 2. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue (2.1-49)
 - a) The dream and Nebuchadnezzar's threat (2.1-13)
 - b) Daniel's response and prayer (2.14-24)
 - c) Daniel interprets the dream (2.25-45)
 - d) Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel (2.46-49)
 3. Nebuchadnezzar builds a great statue (3.1-30)

¹ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1582.

² *ESV Study Bible*, 1582-3.

³ Ryken, Leland, et al. *Ryken's Bible Handbook* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 633.

- a) The nations worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue (3.1-7)
- b) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preserved in the fiery furnace (3.8-29)
- c) Nebuchadnezzar promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3.30)
- 4. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a toppled tree (4.1-37)
 - a) Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (4.1-27)
 - b) Nebuchadnezzar's humbling (4.28-33)
 - c) Nebuchadnezzar's exaltation (4.34-37)
- 5. Belshazzar's feast (5.1-31)
 - a) An idolatrous feast (5.1-4)
 - b) An unreadable message (5.5-9)
 - c) A forgotten interpreter (5.10-12)
 - d) A message of judgment (5.13-31)
- 6. The lion's den (6.1-28)
 - a) Daniel promoted (6.1-3)
 - b) The administrators' plot to remove Daniel (6.4-15)
 - c) Daniel preserved in the lion's den (6.16-24)
 - d) Darius acknowledges the power of Daniel's God (6.25-27)
 - e) Daniel preserved until the end of the exile (6.28)
- B. The Visions of Daniel (7.1-12.13)
 - 1. The vision of four great beasts and the heavenly court (7.1-28)
 - a) The four great beasts (7.1-8)
 - b) The Ancient of Days judges the beasts (7.9-12)
 - c) The coming of the Son of Man (7.13-14)
 - d) The interpretation of the vision (7.15-27)
 - e) Daniel's response (7.28)
 - 2. The vision of the ram, the goat, and the little horn (8.1-27)
 - a) The vision of the ram and the goat (8.1-14)
 - b) The interpretation of the vision (8.15-26)
 - c) Daniel's response (8.27)
 - 3. Daniel's prayer and its answer (9.1-27)
 - a) Daniel's prayer concerning the 70 years (9.1-19)
 - b) Gabriel's answer: 70 sevens before the promised redemption (9.20-27)
 - 4. Daniel's vision of the final conflict (10.1-12.13)
 - a) A heavenly messenger brings news of heavenly conflict (10.1-11.1)
 - b) A detailed vision of future earthly conflicts among nations (11.2-45)
 - c) The promise of resurrection to glory or shame (12.1-4)
 - d) How long until the end? (12.5-13)⁴

III. Key Passages

A. Interpretation: Visions of Future Empires

1. The Vision of the Statue (Daniel 2)

- a) King Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream (2.3) and demanded its interpretation, but refused to share the details of this dream to any of the wise men (2.5-6). As this is

⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, 1584-5.

impossible by human means, the interpreters failed, and the king ordered that all the wise men in the empire be put to death (2.10-13).

- b) Among these wise men are Daniel and his companions. Daniel tells the king's captain that he would be able to show this interpretation to the king (2.15-16).
 - (1) *Daniel's first response to this is prayer.* He first goes to his companions and asks them to "seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men in Babylon (2.17-18).
 - (2) *Daniel's last response to this is prayer.* When God reveals the details of the dream and its interpretation to Daniel, he "blessed the God of heaven" (2.19-23).
 - c) King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a statue, "mighty and of exceeding brightness" with a head of fine gold, chest and arms of silver, middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. The statue was destroyed and the wind carried the chaff away. The stone that struck the statue became a mountain (2.31-35).
 - d) Daniel reveals that all of these kingdoms would eventually be destroyed and replaced by God's kingdom "that shall never be destroyed" (2.44). Because of this interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar seemingly offers worship to God and promotes Daniel (2.46-47). This should not be taken as true worship, as in the very next chapter he builds a golden idol to be worshipped.
2. The Vision of the Tree (Daniel 4)
 - a) Nebuchadnezzar's second dream was of a great tree, great in height, strong, beautiful, fruitful, offering shelter to animals (4.10-12). The tree was commanded to be chopped down, leaving nothing but a stump (4.13-17).
 - b) This dream quickly came to pass, as Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of a beast (4.28-33). This pointed him to God, at which point his mind was restored as he gave praise and honor to God (4.34-37). His first act of reason was to praise God, and in light of God's self-revelation, Nebuchadnezzar realizes his own kingdom counts for nothing in comparison to God's "everlasting dominion" which "endures from generation to generation" (4.34-35). Whether or not he continued in mind, Scripture is silent.
 3. The Writing on the Wall (Daniel 6)
 - a) During a feast held by Nebuchadnezzar, the following words appear on the wall: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin (or "Peres," the singular form) are a series of weights.
 - b) Daniel interprets these words to mean the fall of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon to the Medes and Persians.
 4. The Vision of the Four Beasts (Daniel 7)
 - a) The first, a lion with eagles' wings that were plucked off (7.4), perhaps representing the greatness of the Babylonian Empire, combining the "strength and majesty of a lion with the speed and power of an eagle." The plucking off of the wings could then refer to Nebuchadnezzar's humbling (cf. Jer. 49.19-22, Dan. 4).⁵

⁵ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1600.

- b) The second, a bear, raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth (7.5). Scholars have suggested that the unevenness of the bear may represent the uneven power between Media and Persia, and that the three ribs represents the kings conquered by Cyrus (Astyages 550 B.C., Anatolia 547, and Croesus 547).
 - c) The third, part leopard, part bird, with four wings and four heads, perhaps referring to the speed with which Alexander conquered the world (by age 32, in ten years' time) and the four generals between whom he divided the empire: Antipater, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.
 - d) The fourth, terrifying and dreadful with iron teeth and ten horns, perhaps symbolizing the ruthlessness of the Roman Empire and its ten emperors from Julius Caesar to Domitian.
5. The Vision of the Ram and the Goat (Daniel 8)
- a) A ram with two horns, one longer than the other, provokes similar imagery to the bear with one side raised.
 - b) It was destroyed by a male goat with a single conspicuous horn, shattered and replaced by four horns.

6. The traditional interpretation of church history is that these five visions are one and the same.

	Statue (Ch. 2)	Tree (Ch. 4)	Writing (Ch. 5)	Four Beasts (Ch. 7)	Ram & Goat (Ch. 8)
Babylonian Empire (625-539 B.C.)	Head of gold (vv. 36-38) represents the power and glory achieved by the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar	Nebuchadnezzar humbled (vv. 19-37)	Mene, Mene, Tekel (vv. 26-27) -- God has numbered the days of your kingdom	Lion with wings of eagle (v. 4), wings plucked off like Nebuchadnezzar's humbling.	
Medo-Persian Empire (539-331 B.C.)	Chest and arms of silver (vv. 32, 39)		Parsin (v. 28) -- Your kingdom will be given to the Medes and Persians.	Bear raised up on one side (v. 5), the uneven power of Media and Persia.	Ram with two horns, one longer than the other (vv. 2-4)
Greek Empire (331-63 B.C.)	Middle and thighs of bronze (vv. 32, 39). These two empires, though not as glorious as the Babylonian, was nonetheless united and strong.			Leopard with four wings and four heads (v. 6), Alexander's speed and four generals.	Male goat with one horn; it was broken and four horns came up (vv. 5-8); Antiochus IV (vv. 23-26)
Roman Empire (over Palestine, 63 B.C.-A.D. 476)	Legs or iron, feet of iron and clay (vv. 33, 40-43). Though as strong as iron, the Roman Empire also contained a mixture of many peoples, which became its ultimate undoing.			Terrifying beast with iron teeth (v. 7), the ruthlessness of Rome with its ten emperors.	
Future Events	Messianic kingdom, stone (vv. 44-45), the mountain that filled the whole earth.			Antichrist, little horn uttering great boasts (vv. 8-II)	

7. Medo-Persia or Media and Persia, and Why it Matters
 - a) If the four empires in Nebuchadnezzar's first dream refer to separate empires of Media and Persia, then it would be possible for Daniel to have been written in the second-century B.C. rather than the sixth-century B.C. as a man-written descriptive narrative, rather than a divinely-inspired predictive prophecy. The empire of iron and clay cannot refer to the Roman Empire, as it would not yet have extended its reign over Palestine.
 - b) Such scholars point to the fact that Darius the Mede is a character for whom historical records cannot account, lending credence to the idea that the book of Daniel is a work of fiction. Historical accounts often include Belshazzar (who reigned after Nebuchadnezzar) and Cyrus the Great without including the reign of Darius in between.
 - (1) It is possible that Darius is the Babylonian name assumed by Cyrus the Persian. Thus, Dan. 6.28 could be read "during the reign of Darius the Mede, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian."
 - (2) It is also possible that our knowledge of this period is incomplete, and therefore that Darius the Mede was a minor king who reigned for a short period between Belshazzar of Babylon and Cyrus of Persia. The fact that records of Darius have not been discovered does not necessarily conclude that records of Darius do not exist or did not exist at some point in time.
 - c) Media was never an independent world power after Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 B.C. Historically, it would not make sense for a narrative to refer to Media and Persia separately. We should assert with Scripture that Daniel is a divinely-inspired predictive prophecy of future events, and dismiss such interpretations which try to deny the Bible's inspired authority.
- B. Trials: The fiery furnace and the lion's den
 - I. The Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3)
 - a) Nebuchadnezzar made a huge image of gold, sixty cubits in height and six cubits in breadth, or about 90 feet tall, 9 feet wide (3.1). He commanded all the people to bow down and worship the image whenever the music played upon pain of death by fiery furnace (3.6).
 - b) It is noted that "certain Jews," Daniel's companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to worship this idol (3.12). They answered that it is because they serve God that they refuse to worship this idol (3.16).
 - c) In anger, Nebuchadnezzar orders the furnace heated seven times more than usual, so much so that the men who took up the three friends are killed by the heat of the furnace (3.19-22).
 - d) The three friends were thrown into the fire bound, yet in the furnace they were able to walk in the midst of the fire. They were thrown in three individuals, yet Nebuchadnezzar noted that a fourth figure "like a son of the gods" is in the furnace with them (3.25). The men throwing the three friends in were killed by the heat, yet the three friends are brought out of the fire and are found to be unharmed.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the people must not speak against this God and promoted the three friends (3.29-30).

2. The Lions' Den (Daniel 6)

- a) Years have passed since the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and the episodes of the two dreams, the fiery furnace, and the writing on the wall, and yet Daniel has still maintained the good favor of those in power, as he is now chosen as one of three presidents to oversee 120 satraps over the entire kingdom (6.1-3).
- b) In an attempt to find fault with Daniel, the other presidents and satraps conspire against Daniel "in connection with the law of his God" (6.4-5).
- c) Like Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold, Darius' proclamation includes denying God and a sentence of death (6.7).
- d) It is seemingly not Darius' intention to bring harm to Daniel, as he was "much distressed" when Daniel was caught (6.14), expressed hope for deliverance as he sealed the den (6.16), quickly relieved Daniel of the den the next day (6.19-20), and was exceedingly glad when Daniel was not harmed (6.23). Persian law meant that any law passed by the king could not be revoked (cf. 6.8, Esther).
- e) As in the case of the interpretation of the dreams and the fiery furnace, Daniel's response to this crisis is prayer, which is remarkable considering that that is what is expressly forbidden (6.10). Henry, "He did not retire into the country, nor abscond for some time, though he knew the law was levelled against him; but, because he knew it was so, therefore he stood his ground, knowing that he had now a fair opportunity of honouring God before men, and showing that he preferred his favour, and his duty to him, before life itself. When Daniel knew that the writing was signed he might have gone to the king, and expostulated with him about it; nay, he might have remonstrated against it, as grounded upon a misinformation that all the presidents had consented to it, whereas he that was chief of them had never been consulted about it; but he went to his house, and applied himself to his duty, cheerfully trusting God with the event."

C. Lessons

1. Reading Daniel, it can be easy to become preoccupied with trying to interpret and understand obscure passages, particularly his visions and prophecies of future events. Rather than trying to understand these passages infallibly, we should understand that God is sovereign over all human history (Dan. 7.6, "dominion was given to it"; cf. Prov. 21.1, Is. 44.28, Is. 45.1) and that one day he will ultimately establish his eternal kingdom (Dan. 7.13-14).
2. Daniel and his friends were wise men in the Babylonian Empire, and Daniel himself was even commended and promoted for his gifts (Dan. 2.46-49, 3.30, 6.3). It is therefore possible to honor and glorify God in a country and a society that rejects God. This does not mean that we must accept everything commanded by our society and government (Dan. 3.16-18). Daniel's three friends were willing to "obey the king's orders as far as they could, and would be ready to bear a public testimony against this gross idolatry."⁶ Ultimately, this can even have the effect of influencing society to honor and glorify God, however sincerely or insincerely (6.25-28).

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2014, www.biblestudytools.com.