

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



UNCHANGING FAITH IN EVER-CHANGING TIMES

DANIEL

The book of Daniel is probably the most well-known of the Major Prophets, but it is also the most contested. Daniel was about 20 years old when he was taken to Babylon and was probably 23 when he was called of God to serve in the high office of prophet. This means that Daniel still had vivid memories of the devastation and horror of being conquered and ripped from his homeland, and there is evidence in this book that he never forgot his home and he continually longed to go back.

This book comes from the final humiliations of the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C., as he began to empty the treasury and take from the best families individuals who would serve his court well; and Daniel was one of those individuals. If you remember, this humiliation and exile occurred in waves, and Daniel was part of the first wave taken.

His name means “God is my Judge” and points to the unwavering commitment that he had toward God, even in the midst of extreme opposition. However, it was this unwavering commitment to God’s commands that upheld Daniel and caused him to prosper while those rulers whom he served under continually changed. Daniel served under four different rulers. While these powerful men were brought down and removed, God kept Daniel safe and continuing to work in a place of authority. This only happened because God was Daniel’s judge instead of those leaders over him. This is not to say he was disrespectful, but that Daniel honored those placed over him where he could. However, once they crossed the line of God’s law, that was a place where Daniel would not follow.

Another interesting fact about the Book of Daniel is that it is the only book written in two languages. Daniel 2 through Daniel 7 are written in Aramaic, and the rest of the book is written in Hebrew.

As far as those who would contest this book, several reasons are given. The first and foremost point to the breathtakingly accurate account of this book and state that this work could not have possibly been written during the date proposed and that it most likely had been written later and an unknown author must have simply placed Daniel’s name on it. However, the imperial writing of the Aramaic points to an early date as well as the more recent discovery of the famed Dead Sea Scrolls.

Not only this, the Prophet Ezekiel, who was a contemporary of Daniel, makes mention of him in **Ezekiel 14:14, 20; 28:3**. There is further evidence believed to exist in **Hebrews 11:33** as we see what appears to be a direct reference to an individual who “...stopped the mouth of lions” referencing that great account of God rescuing Daniel from the lion’s den. But the most compelling evidence of all for the authenticity of Daniel occurs in **Matthew 24:15**, when Jesus weighs in on the matter and says, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:).”

Another matter of heavy contention are the miracles listed in this book. But for those of us who believe God's Word, if we know that God can create from nothing, believing the miracles contained in this book is hardly significant.

A final thought in introducing this book comes by way of the apocalyptic nature of the book. What is meant by "apocalyptic" is that it is a writing that predicts a coming destruction. John MacArthur, describing the book of Daniel says, "What Revelation is to the New Testament prophetically and apocalyptically, Daniel is to the Old Testament." And while this is true, it actually goes a little further than this. The book of Daniel and the book of Revelation are tied together. One cannot understand the book of Daniel fully without understanding Revelation, and conversely, one cannot understand the book of Revelation correctly without understanding the book of Daniel. More will be discussed regarding this, but for now, let's see if we can outline this book in a way that makes sense.

How to Think About Daniel

Daniel is a unique mixture of history and prophecy. In the beginning chapters, you will immediately notice that Daniel speaks of himself in the third person ("Daniel did this..." "Daniel did that..."), but once you get to the later chapters in the book, you will notice that Daniel starts referring to himself in the first person where it will be observed that Daniel narrates with the words, "I, Daniel..."

If you understand this, you can easily identify that the book of Daniel is broken up into these two different sections— History and Prophecy.

The Personal History of Daniel (Chapters 1-6)— This section is riddled with exciting narrative and harrowing faith. If we are placing ourselves in these dangerous situations of which we read, all we are really left with is a hope that perhaps we would respond in the same way Daniel and his companions did in these situations. Daniel's personal history is a stunning testimony to any who might be tempted to give in to the society around them.

A Confronted Testimony (Chapters 1-2): It is here that we are introduced to the great character of Daniel. This is where we find him confronted with a choice— Honor God, or honor man. Daniel also understood that it was not just a decision that would affect him, it was a decision that would affect three young men who were watching. This is the nature of faith in God. It never simply affects you. It carries over into the lives of the younger generation who is watching. So as the command was given to eat what was not lawful to eat under the command of God, Daniel politely requested to be placed under a different diet which was ultimately granted. And because Daniel chose to honor God, God began to honor Daniel and the three young men he had taken under his care.

In chapter 2 you find the account of Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream, which God answered through Daniel and caused Daniel to be a huge name among all of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors. Each time Daniel's life was on the line, he trusted God to make a way.

A Continuing Testimony (Chapters 3-6): Starting in chapter 3, the testimony of God's people was under attack again. However, in chapter 3, it was not Daniel whose faith was tried, it was the lives and faith of those three Hebrew boys, Shadrach (also called Hananiah), Meshach (also called Mishael), and Abed-Nego (also called Azariah). At this point, Daniel was not on the scene, and so it was up to these young men to make a decision: Would they bow down and worship the image of king Nebuchadnezzar to save their lives? Or would they refuse and be thrown into a fiery furnace? Would the taught testimony of Daniel be continued, or would it fail in the lives of these young men? Was their faith only determined by Daniel's, or was it something that was their own?

Well, as we see in the narrative, their faith was their own now. They had taken responsibility to only worship God, just as Daniel had.

Lastly, in chapters 4-6, you find that even at the end of Daniel's life, he continued to honor God. The most famed example of this is when Daniel was placed into the den of lions because of his prayer life. He would not pray to king Darius as was required by law during a specific time-frame, but instead continued to only pray to God. God once again provided the victory here and we see that we can truly honor God at every stage of our lives. Our testimony for God can and should continue.

The Prophetic Highlights of Daniel (Chapters 7-12)— What we find in these chapters are some very specific and very intriguing prophecies. There has been some mention of double fulfillment prophecies in earlier chapters, and here we run into this once more as Daniel deals with not only forth-telling for the more immediate future, but the ultimate fulfillment of some of these prophecies that will not arrive until the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Vision of the Future (Chapters 7-8): In this section we read of a vision that Daniel has regarding the four great beasts. In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream. In this dream he saw a vision of an image that had a head of gold (symbolizing the Babylonian king), shoulders of silver (symbolizing the Medo-Persian empire), a trunk of bronze (symbolizing the Grecian empire), two legs of iron (symbolizing the Roman empire), and all of these empires resting on feet of clay and iron mingled together.

This vision reaches from Daniel's day, all the way to the second coming of Jesus Christ. But what was particularly troubling for king Nebuchadnezzar was the fact that there was a stone that was seen. This stone was striking the image on its feet and was utterly demolishing it. The image blew away in the wind, but the stone grew into a great mountain that began to fill the entire earth. This stone is Jesus and points to His eventual reign over the whole earth.

However, in this vision of Nebuchadnezzar, it was to be interpreted from man's point of view. When we arrive here in Daniel 7, it is to be understood from God's point of view. Man loves their images, but when God is telling the story, he views nations as beasts. Instead of mighty memorials, they are just mindless beasts that fight with one another now and again.

By the time you reach chapter 8, Daniel has had a second vision about a battle that takes place between a country identified as a ram, and a country identified as the he-goat, which are later identified in chapter 11.

The Volatility of the Future (Chapters 9-10): It is here where you reach the seventy years of desolation. This is where you learn of the transgression of God's people and once Daniel hears this, he offers a prayer, and by the end of this prayer, Daniel provides one of the most astounding prophecies in all of the Bible. This is the prophecy of the seventy weeks, which we will address in a moment.

In chapter 10, we get a little look behind the scenes as God reveals His sovereign work inside the workings of humanity.

The Venture of the Future (Chapter 11): A venture is a risky course of action, and that is exactly what we see in chapter 11. Most of this chapter is fulfilled prophecy and details the conflict between Syria and Egypt, with the little nation of Israel caught in the middle. We also have information of things yet to come as the time of tribulation is recorded.

The Victory of the Future (Chapter 12): This chapter has to do with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What you are reading when you take in Daniel 12 is God drawing the time of sin and rebellion to a close forever.

What to Look for in Daniel

This book is rich with all kinds of information that is both instructional and compelling. Its instruction causes us to be encouraged to remain steadfast in the culture around us, and compelling, because we realize that we have something to look forward to— the Second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prophecy—

As you already gathered, the book of Daniel contains some of the most exciting prophecies in all of the Bible. This is not to say that other prophetic writings are insignificant. But it is to say that these prophecies are so specific and describe so perfectly what to expect, they have the ability to continually ignite our hearts to the wonder of God's word. Let's look at a few.

The Growing Stone: You read of this in Daniel 2 and as mentioned previously, it is Jesus who became the great mountain that filled the whole earth (2:35). He consumes all other kingdoms and powers.

The Image and the Beasts: Once again, this was covered in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 regarding the image of Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Clay, which represented different kingdoms as man perceived them, and then again in chapter 7 when the same kingdoms were dealt with from God's perspective. We learned in chapter 7 that God does not look at these kingdoms as a "grand image" but as roaming beasts.

Actually, the kingdoms in total that Daniel ultimately deals with, describes six different kingdoms instead of four. Added into these prophecies, Daniel reaches far beyond the Roman Empire (which would not come to power until several hundred years after this book was written), but to the kingdom of the Anti-Christ, and eventually, to the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The Seventy Weeks: This is perhaps the most astonishing prophecy found in this book as we look closely at chapter 9. Now, I will caution and say that there are different interpretations of this section of Scripture which could potentially be accurate as well, but as far as what seems most reasonable to me at this time, it appears we can understand this passage in the following way:

In this chapter Daniel uses the term "seventy weeks" but it is clear from the passage that each day represents a year's time. Since there are 7 days in a week, what we have then is the simple math equation of 70×7 , which comes out to be 490 (years). Then, Daniel breaks this number down a bit, and gives a more precise number of 483 years. After this, in verse 25, Daniel talks about the beginning of the 69th week and 1 week. He said that this will occur when Jerusalem would be rebuilt. We have a definite date for this because it is recorded for us in Nehemiah 2 where we see the wall and the city began to be rebuilt in 445 B.C. This is significant because from this time, Daniel said that we should be looking for the "Messiah the Prince". That said, if I can simplify this a bit, Daniel was saying that from the time that the city would be rebuilt, to the time when the Messiah would come would be 483 years.

Well, a man named Sir Robert Anderson conducted a calculation from this time, to the day that Jesus died on the cross and found that it happened 483 years later to the day just as Daniel predicted.

Miracles—

A Godly Health Plan: This comes from Daniel 1, when Daniel and his three young disciples were given food to eat that was unlawful for them to eat. Daniel sought a compromise from his caretaker that he be given ten days to try a diet of 'pulse' instead of the king's meat and wine to keep them nourished. This was agreed to and after ten days, the Bible says that their skin was fairer and fatter than those that ate of the king's meat and drank from the king's wine. This miracle was God's way of blessing those men who took a stand for God's law.

A Walk To Remember: This account occurs in chapter 3. Once again a stand was taken against the king's orders because it directly conflicted with the command of God. Three young men were taken and cast into a furnace, but there were four walking in the midst of the flames. God was there to save His own.

A Night at Lion's Den Inn: In chapter 6, king Darius was now on the throne and was tricked into making a foolish law that was aimed at Daniel. Those leaders who ruled with Daniel were threatened by his authority and decided to try to eliminate him. Their plan worked, but not as they intended. They did not intend for the One true God to come to Daniel's aid

and shut the mouths of the lions, causing his life to be spared. Once again, aside from the miracle of the dreams, the miracles performed in this book all had to do with God's people taking a stand for their God.

What to Gain from Daniel

As in our previous studies, there is so much to unpack and present as far as what this book means for our day. However, if we were to condense Daniel down to one predominate truth that would cover the entire book, I think it would this:

It is Better to Live in Light of God's Sovereignty than to be forced to Experience It—

In every single instance the unseen hand of God is made known in this book. In those instances where God's people were challenged, we find them living in light of God's sovereignty, casting themselves on God's ultimate goodness and grace, choosing to obey God and His plan rather than trying to obey men.

On the other hand, leader after leader learned an important lesson far too late. They were forced to experience God's Sovereignty. They couldn't stand and fight God's plan. They were mere instruments in the hand of an Almighty God.

And as we peer into the future, let us do the same as Daniel and his companions— let us live in light of God's sovereignty knowing that He will fulfill what He has said, rather than be forced to experience it because of our unbelief.



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